

# THE ASL PHRASES WORKSHOP

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### A Guide to ASL

- It is a common misconception that ASL is merely the finger spelling of English words. Fingerspelling – using the manual alphabet to spell out entire words letter by letter – is occasionally incorporated into ASL, but the vocabulary of ASL consists of signs.
- The format of this workshop is not that of a traditional foreign language. There are no formal grammatical exercises or drills, and there are no vocabulary lists to memorize. **Rather, this is a guide to conversation with deaf people. It contains phrases, expressions, sentences, and questions that come up in casual, everyday conversations. These phrases enable you to begin talking with deaf people without first having to master the grammar of the language.**
- It covers the major components of ASL grammar. It is not a complete grammar of ASL. It is intended to help you better understand the structure of the sentences, but it is not necessary that you understand the grammatical structure before you begin signing those sentences.

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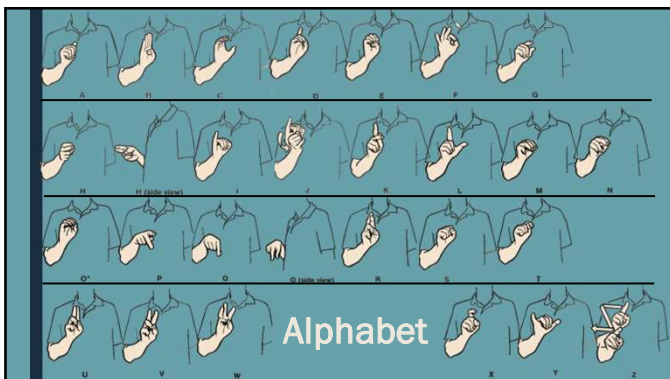
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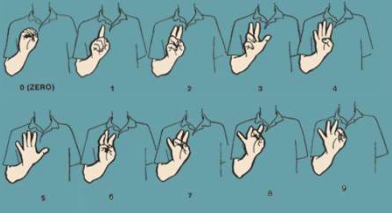
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0 (ZERO) 1 2 3 4  
5 6 7 8 9

\* The signs for the number 6 and the letter W are exactly the same, and the sign for the number 9 is the same as that for the letter F. Context tells you whether the number or the letter is intended.



**Numbers, Time, Dates and Money**

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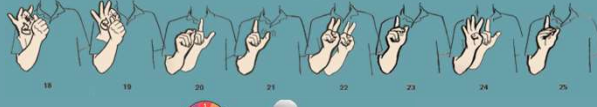
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10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17

\* The numbers 16 through 19 are actually a very fast blend of 10 and 6, 10 and 7, 10 and 8, 10 and 9.



18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25



**Numbers, Time, Dates and Money**

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26 27 28 29

\* That the "2" in the twenties is made with the thumb and index finger rather than the index and second fingers – as it appears in the number 22 – is probably due to the fact that ASL has its roots in the old French sign language. In Europe, even hearing people count one with the thumb, and two with the thumb and index finger.



30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39

\* The remaining numbers from 30 through 99 are done with the numbers 0 through 9.



40 41 42 43 44 45 46 47 48 49



**Numbers, Time, Dates and Money**

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100      777 (A)      777 (B)      1,000      1,000,000

\* The number 100 is made by signing the number 1 and the letter C.  
 \* The numbers between 100 and 999 are made in one of two ways. One may make the number "7-7-7" or one may sign "7-C-7-7".

1/4 (A)      1/4 (B)

\* Fractions are made the same way they are written, one number above another.

10      per cent (%)  
 10 per cent.

**Numbers, Time, Dates and Money**

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\* The sign for the decimal may also mean the punctuation mark "period."  
 1-7-9

NUMBER      WHAT  
 What's your number?

MY      PHONE      NUMBER  
 My phone number is \_\_\_\_\_

T-T-Y      HAVE  
 Do you have a TTY?

\* The TTY or TDD is a device that permits one to type messages back and forth over the telephone.

**Numbers, Time, Dates and Money**

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TIME      4-4-5      TIME      10      UNTIL      9  
 It is 4:45.      It is ten till nine.

TIME      6-15      HE/SHE/IT      OLD      87  
 It is 6:15.      He is 87 years old.

**Numbers, Time, Dates and Money**

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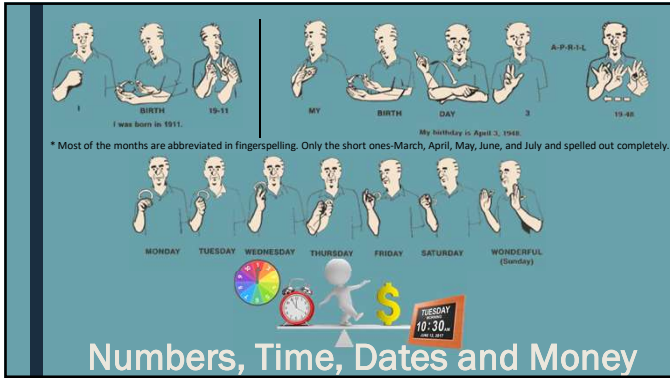
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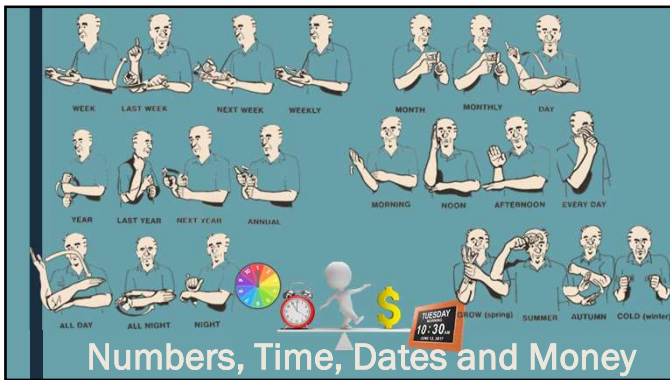
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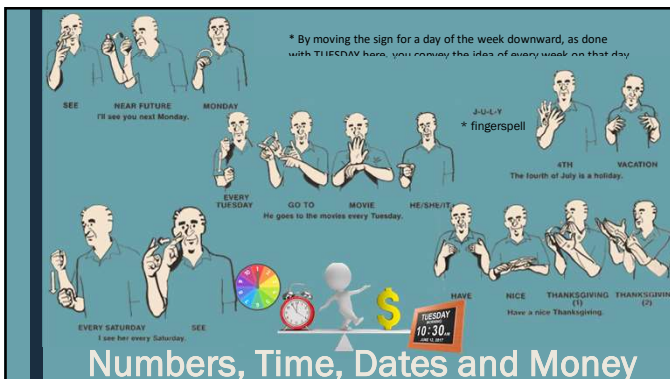
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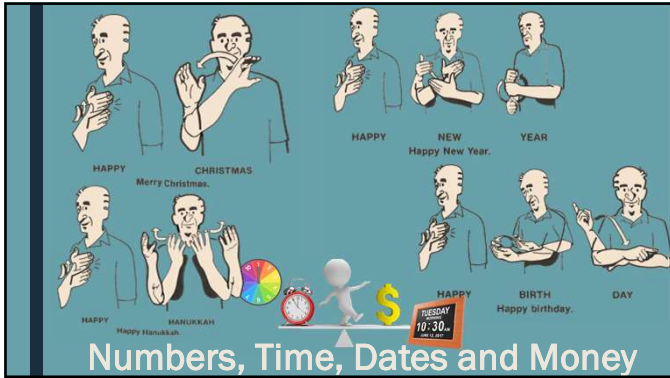
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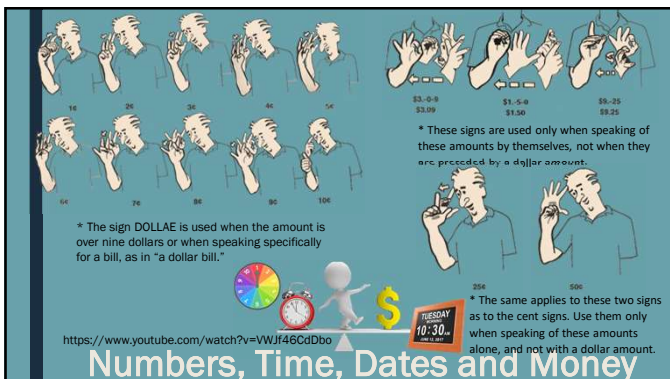
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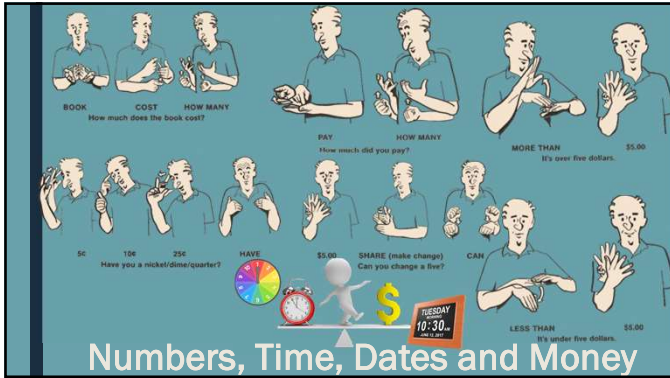
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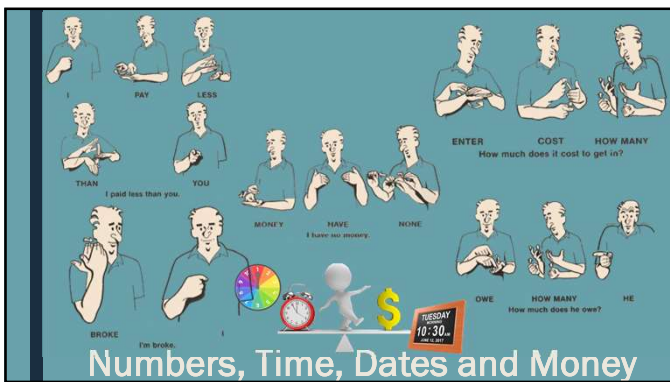
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### The Sight Line

- We begin the ASL workshop with an understanding of how space is used. Imagine a line extending from the center of the signer's chest, straight out, parallel to the floor. This imaginary line is called the sight line. **The sight line divides all space into the right or left side.**
- Whenever the signer turns the body, the sight line moves with it.

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## Light, Sight, And Space

- Most languages are based entirely on sounds, and herein lies the unique difference between spoken language and ASL. Instead of sound waves in the form of spoken words, **ASL uses light waves in the form of signs.** ASL is a visual-spatial language. One sees ASL, and hearing plays *absolutely no part in it.* Because of this, ASL consists not only of signs made with the hands, but also of facial expressions, head movements, body movements, and an efficient use of the space around the signer. (In ASL the person "speaking" is the signer, and the person "listening" is the watcher, observer, or reader.) ASL is not mime, although mime sometimes is incorporated into the language.

Difference between sound waves and light waves

SOUND WAVES	LIGHT WAVES
Sound waves need a material medium for their propagation.	Light waves do not need a material medium for their propagation. They can travel even through vacuum.
Sound waves are longitudinal.	Light waves are transverse.
Sound waves have a very low speed of about 330 m/s at room temperature.	Light waves have a very high speed of $3 \times 10^8$ m/s in vacuum or air.

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### Placement of Signs

One of the most frequently used signs is a simple point with the index finger. When the signer points parallel to the sight line toward the watcher, it means "you". When the signer points to his or her own chest, it means "I" or "me." When the signer points to the right or the left of the sight line it means "he," "she," or "it."

"I saw your father yesterday. He was driving a new car."

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### Placement of Signs

The signer makes the sign for "see" toward the right.

\* This movement tells the watcher that the signer is about to say something about someone. Then the signer signs "father," and that tells the watcher who the someone is. The watcher also now knows that "father" occupies that space to the right of the sight line because the SEE sign moved toward that space.

"I saw your father yesterday. He was driving a new car."

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### Placement of Signs

Placement of more than one person, place, or object in the same space at the same time may not be done, but placement in other spaces at the same time may be done. For example, the signer may say, "Yesterday I went to a restaurant, a movie, and a museum." **The three places are set up in three different spaces.** Notice that the restaurant is nearer the signer, and the movie is farther out. Both may be to the right of the sight line, but they occupy slightly different spaces.



"Yesterday, I went to a restaurant, a movie, and a museum."

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### Placement of Signs

An exception to this rule is illustrated by this example:

The signer first establishes the book, then points to it. When placing things on the sight line that have no reference to the watcher, place them near the signer and be sure to point to that space.



"I have a book. It is interesting."

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### Facial Expressions



- Facial expressions in ASL are especially important when asking questions. In general, when one asks a "wh" question (who, what, where, why, when, which, and how) the eyebrows usually go downward.

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### Facial Expressions

Downward eyebrows      Raised eyebrows

- All other questions usually cause the eyebrows to move upward.
- The signer must learn to be expressive with the eyes and mouth as well as with the eyebrows.

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### Body Language

- Body language is an essential element of ASL. Information is communicated not only by the face but also by the head, shoulders, torso, legs, and feet. The head may tilt forward, back, or to the side, especially when questions are asked.

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### Past, Present, Future

- No tenses are incorporated in the signs themselves. Tense is conveyed by using signs that tell when an action takes place, and these particular signs are called time indicators. In English for example, one may say, "I saw you." In ASL, the sign SEE is always made the same way whether it means "see," "sees," "seeing," "saw," or "seen."

SEE

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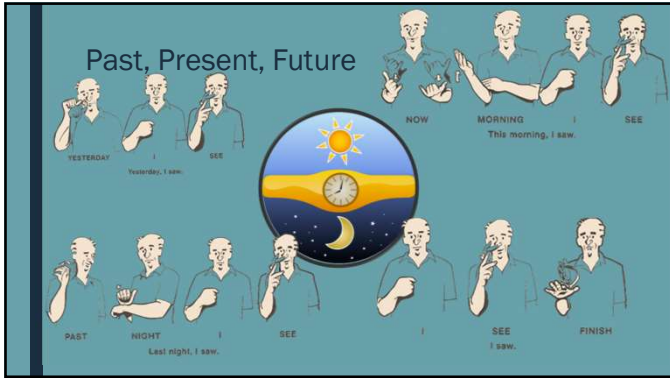
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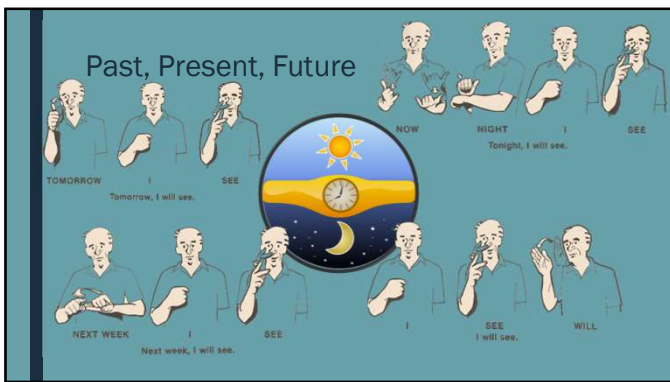
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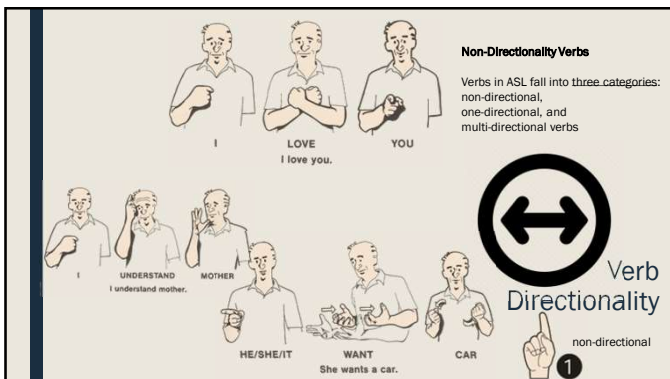
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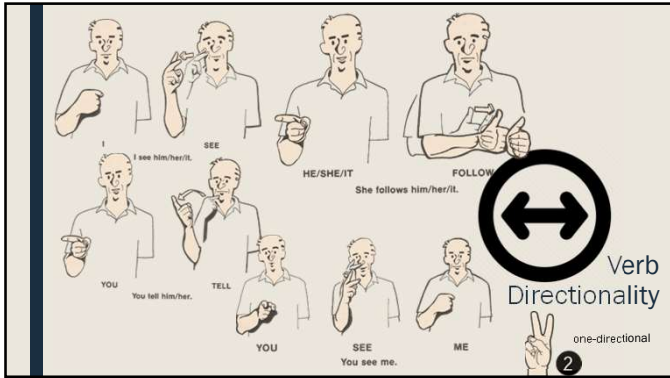
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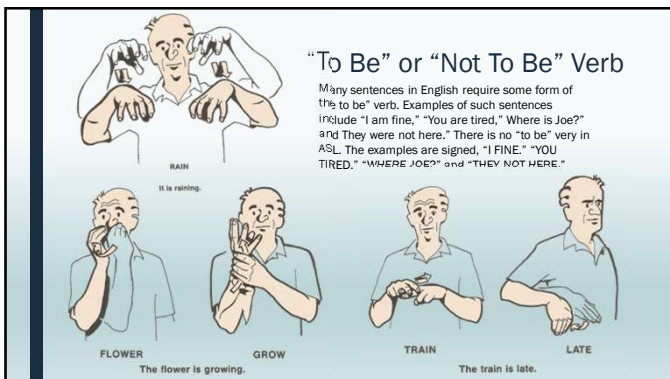
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### “To Be” or “Not To Be” Verb

When the signer wishes to stress or emphasize statements, then the TRUE sign is used. The following statement means simply that I am sick.

The following statement means that I am really sick, or I am very sick:

I                      SICK  
I am sick.

I                      TRUE                      SICK  
I am really sick.

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### Words Versus Signs

- A word stands for a concept or an idea. If someone says “tree,” you understand immediately because you have in your mind the concept of tree. The same applies to signs. If the signer signs TREE, the watcher understands it immediately without having to think the word “tree”. In other words, **a sign stands for an idea or concept; it does not stand for a word.**

Tree

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### Sign Order

One guide to ASL syntax is that the signs are arranged in the same order in which the events they represent occurred in real life. A simple example of this is the sentence, “I am going home after work.” The arrangement of the words here is not in the same order in which these events can occur. One cannot go home until work is over. ASL arranges the signs so that the statement reads, “After work I am going home.” You must develop the habit of thinking: What comes first, then second, then next?

English  
“I am going home after work.”

ASL

1<sup>ST</sup>

2<sup>ND</sup>

3<sup>RD</sup>

“After work I am going home.”

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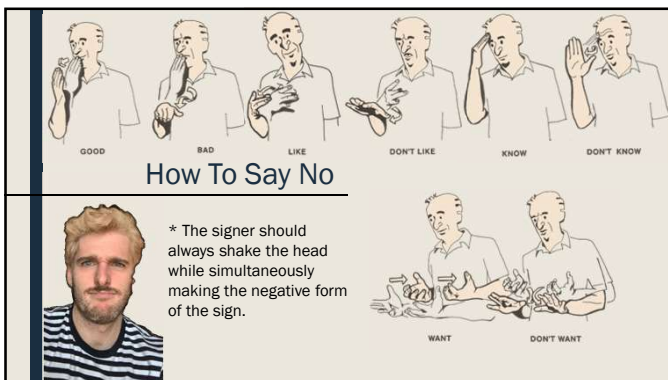
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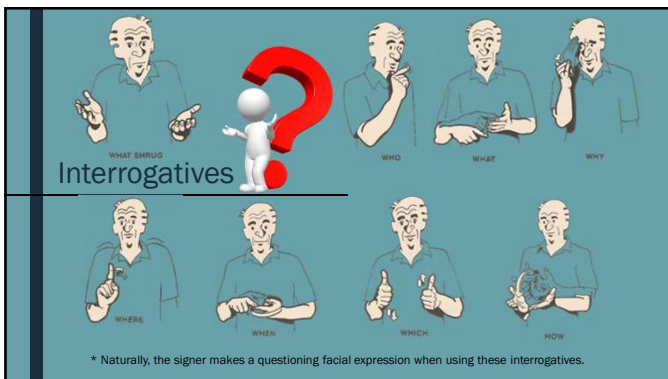
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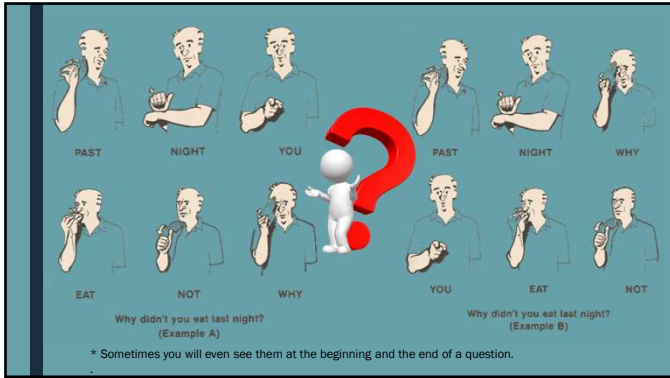
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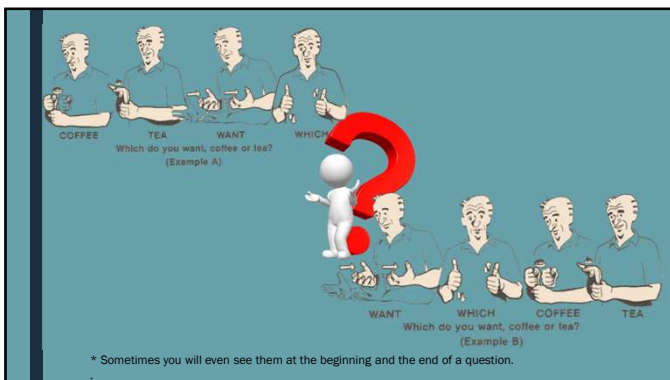
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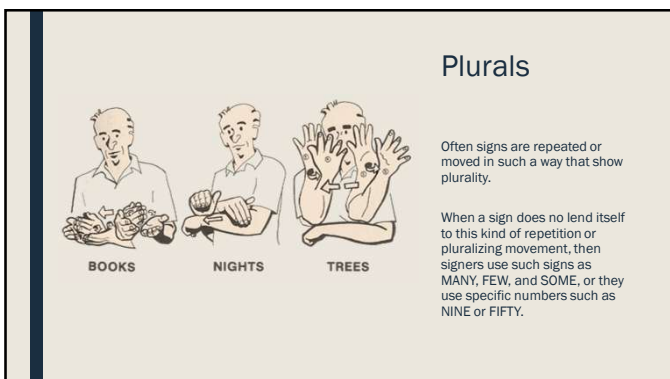
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### Pronouns

All the pronouns may be expressed by just three hand shapes.

- The first group is made up of the pointing pronouns. Simply point to get: I, me, you, he, she, him, her, it.
- The second group is the possessive pronouns:
- The third group is the self pronouns:
- Third person plural pronouns move to a very small area.

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### Pronouns

- First and second person singular pointing pronouns tend to come at the end of a statement:
- Sometimes the first and second person singular point pronouns is dropped entirely, especially in questions.

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### Pronouns

- A simple declarative statement of fact, you may assume the subject is "I."
- If the intent were "You told him," then the sentence would be with "YOU" at the end.
- The second person singular pointing pronoun is usually dropped in questions.

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### Pronouns

- If the intent here were "Did I tell him?" then it would be signed with "I" at the end.
- Command forms rarely use pronouns.

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### Names And Titles

A person's name must be fingerspelled, but most deaf people also have name-signs. A name-sign is one that stands for that person, not for the name. Two people with the same name will have different name-signs. When you first meet a deaf person, you fingerspell your name. You tell him your name-sign only if he asks. Usually name-signs are not asked for until the relationship develops beyond that of a casual acquaintance.

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### A Final Word

**Articles**  
There are no articles (a, an, the) in ASL.

The acquisition of a spoken language involves principally learning grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary. Except for pronunciation, the same applies to learning ASL. **Forming signs clearly is the equivalent of pronunciation in ASL. Clarity in signing depends upon accuracy in making the sign, smoothness in execution of the sign, flow from one sign to the next without jerky or hesitant movements, the use of facial expressions, the use of head and body movements, and the proper use of space.** The only way to develop these is through using the language with deaf people. They will correct you when you err, and by watching them carefully you will correct and fine tune yourself.

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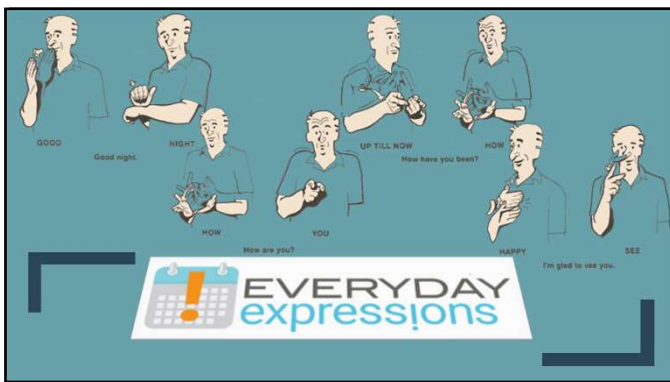
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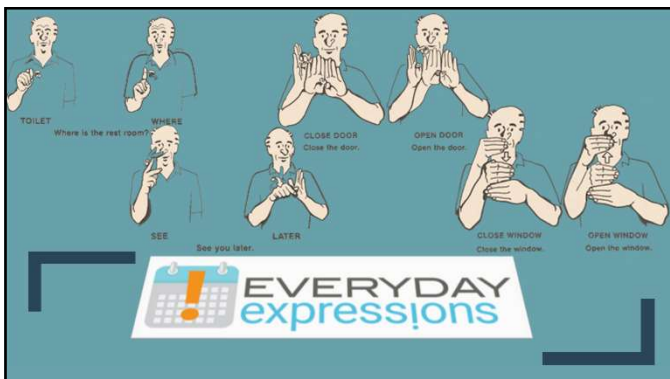
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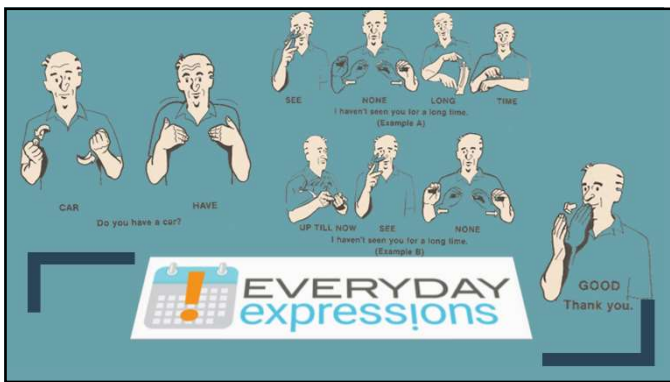
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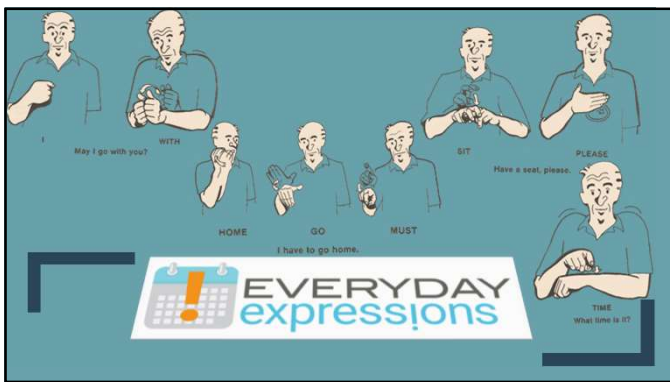
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I LEARN SIGN LANGUAGE

I'm learning sign language.  
 \* The sign LANGUAGE is usually not signed in this expression, so that it reads literally: "I am learning to sign."

**SIGNING AND DEAFNESS**

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SIGN SLOW PLEASE

Sign slowly, please.

AGAIN PLEASE

Please repeat.

**SIGNING AND DEAFNESS**

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FINGERSPELL GOOD CANT I

I can't fingerspell well.

FINGERSPELL CAN BUT

READ GOOD CANT

I can fingerspell but I can't read it well.

**SIGNING AND DEAFNESS**

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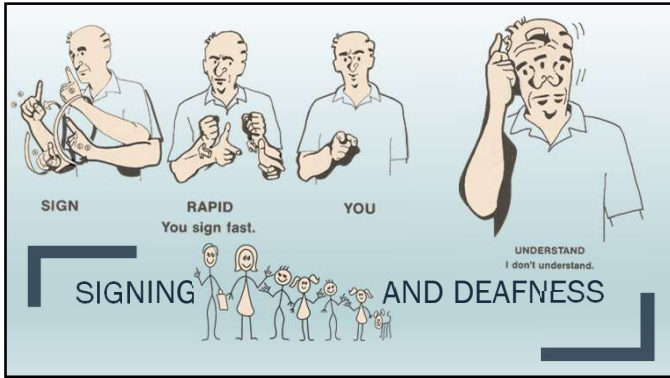
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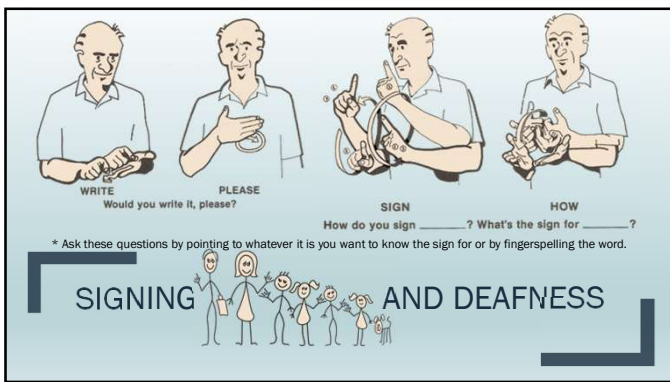
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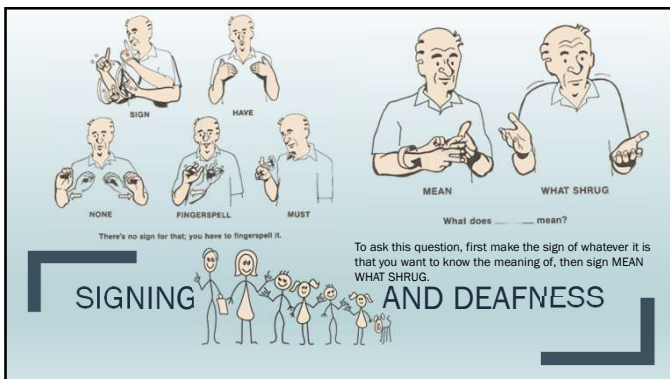
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DEAF (A) DEAF (B) YOU

DEAF DEAF

Are you deaf?

DEAF NOT

SPEAK

I'm not deaf; I'm hearing.

Hearing people are referred to as "speaking" people.

**SIGNING AND DEAFNESS**

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HARD-OF-HEARING

I'm hard-of-hearing.

HEARING AID (A) HEARING AID (B)

HEARING AID (C) USE YOU

Do you use a hearing aid?

The first two signs for "hearing aid" shown here represent the kind of aid that is attached by a cord to a unit worn on the body. The third kind is the type worn behind the ear.

**SIGNING AND DEAFNESS**

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LIPREAD CAN YOU CAN YOU

Can you read lips?

YOU

HEAR LOSE HOW

How did you lose your hearing?

BECOME DEAF

SPEAK LITTLE BIT

I speak a little.

OLD HOW MANY

How old were you when you became deaf?

**SIGNING AND DEAFNESS**

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\* Fingerspell "C-L-U-B" at the beginning of the sentence. It is not necessary to sign "for deaf people", because the word "club" implies that.

BIRTH DEAF  
I was born deaf.

VISIT WANT I  
I want to visit the club for deaf people.

FATHER MOTHER DEAF  
Are your parents deaf?

T.V. SENTENCE PLEASE I  
I enjoy watching T.V. with captions.

**SIGNING AND DEAFNESS**

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PAST NIGHT SENTENCE MOVIE SEE  
I saw a captioned film last night.

SPEAK SCHOOL I  
I went to a school for hearing children.

INSTITUTE GO TO PAST YOU  
Did you go to a residential school for deaf children?

GALLAUDET FIRST COLLEGE FOR DEAF  
Gallaudet College was the first college for deaf people.

**SIGNING AND DEAFNESS**

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MANY DEAF LEARN AGENT  
MANY DEAF LEARN AGENT

ENTER SPEAK COLLEGE  
Many deaf students enter hearing colleges.

ENTER SPEAK COLLEGE  
Many deaf students enter hearing colleges.

GALLAUDET IN WASHINGTON  
Gallaudet College is in Washington, D.C.

**SIGNING AND DEAFNESS**

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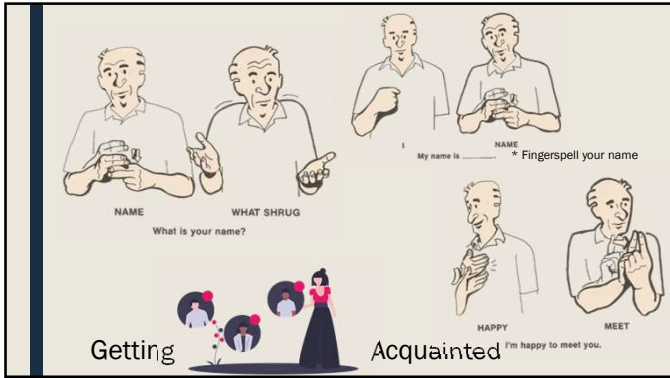
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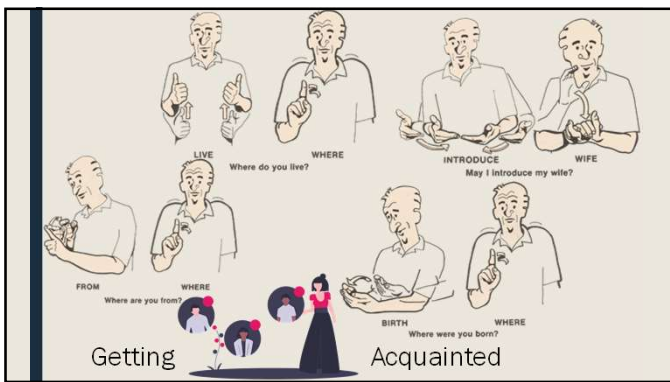
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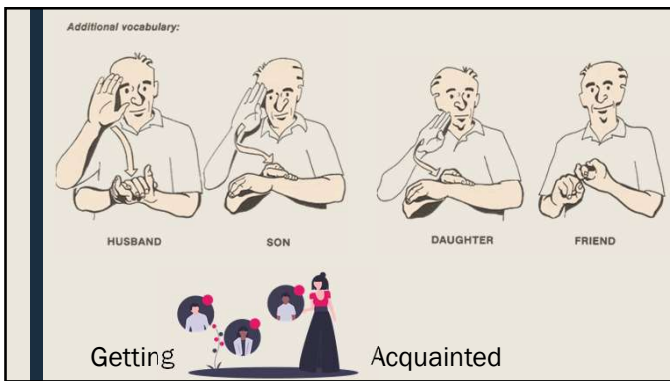
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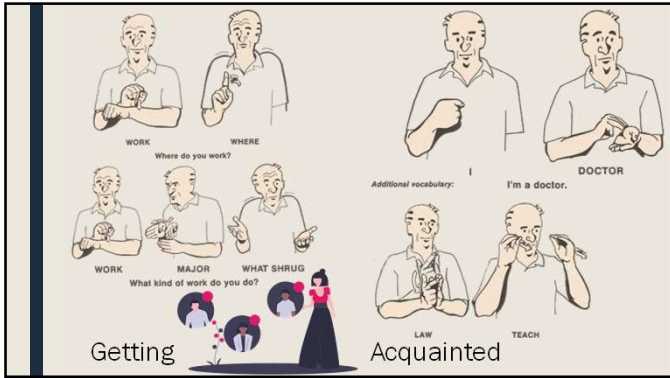
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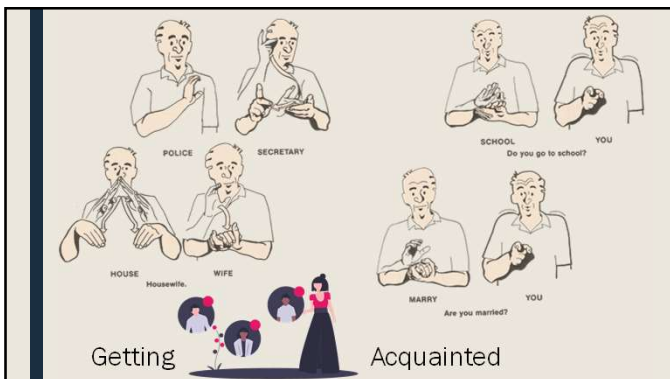
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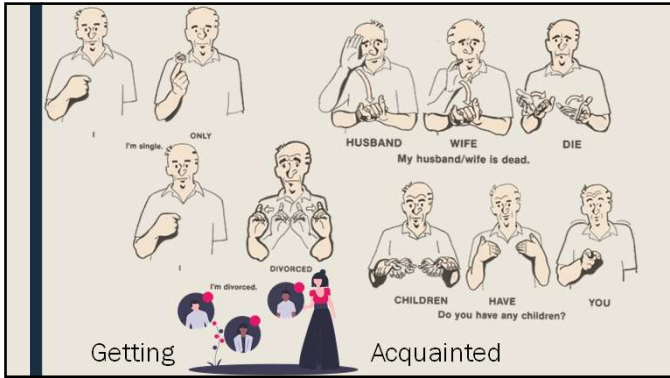
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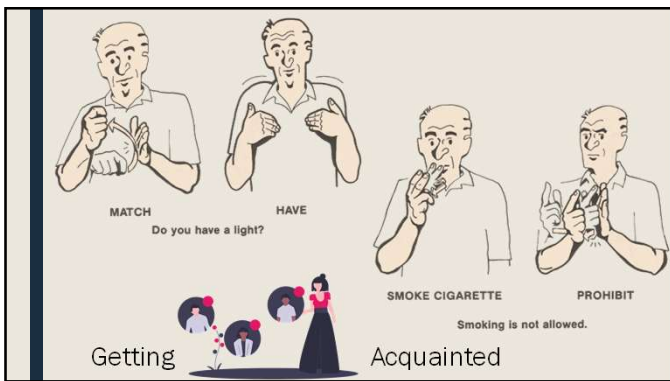
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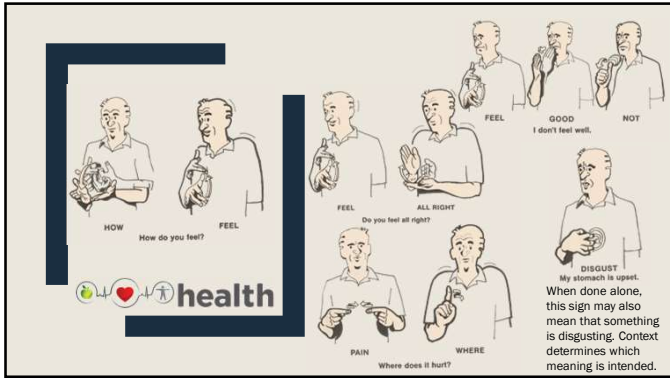
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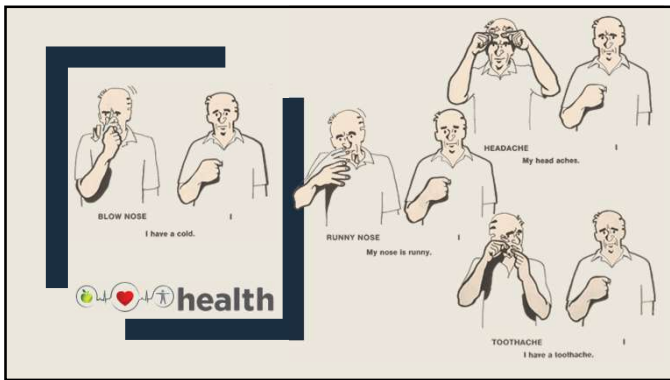
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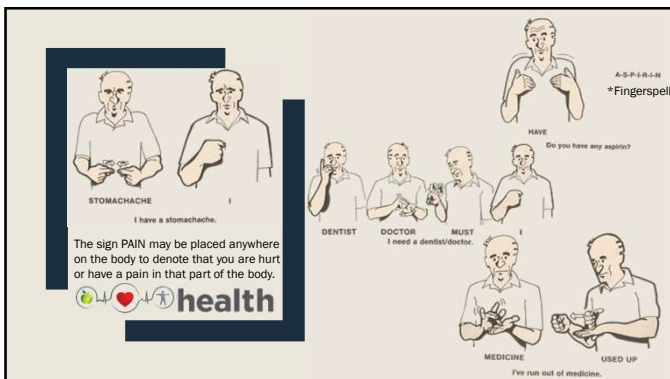
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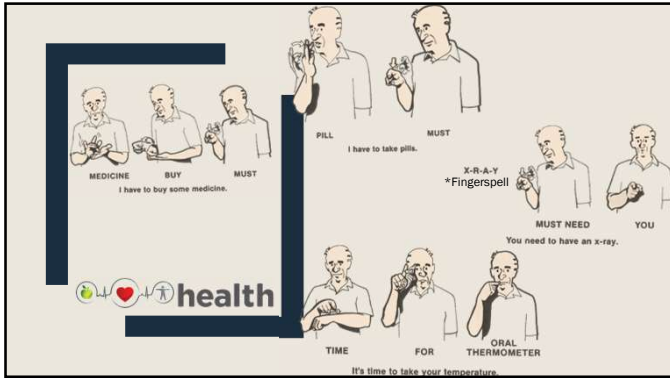
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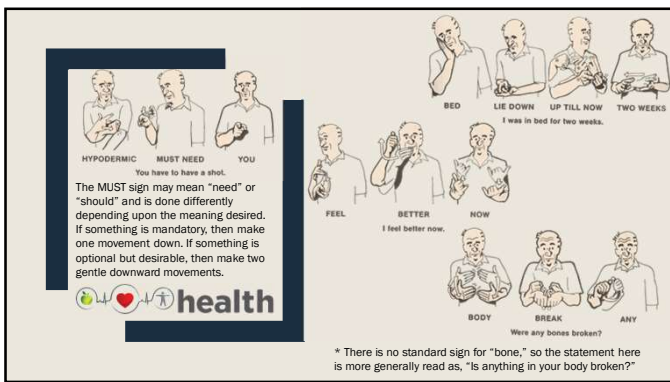
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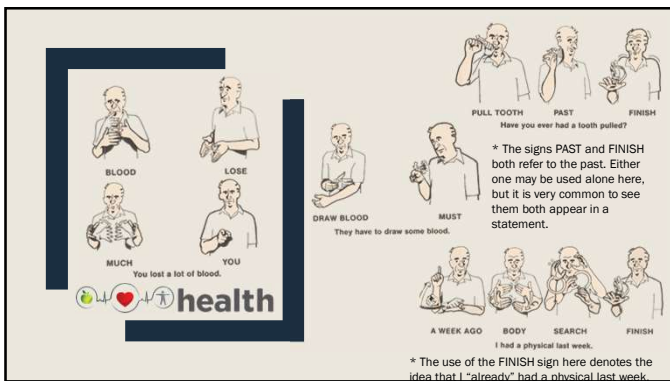
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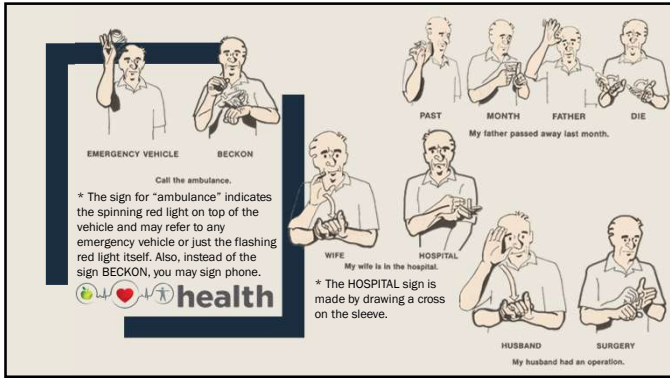
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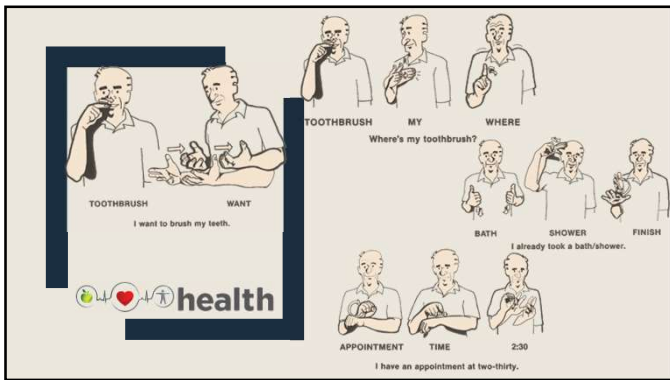
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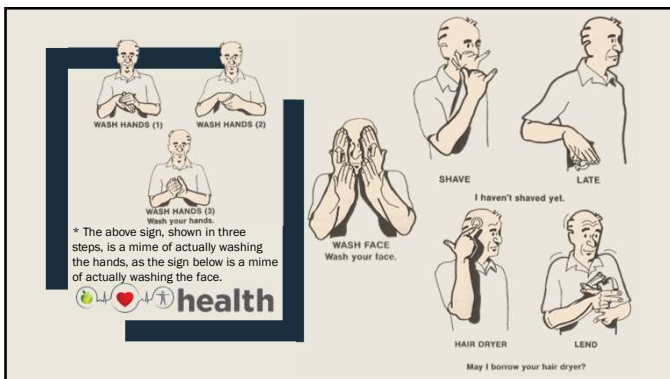
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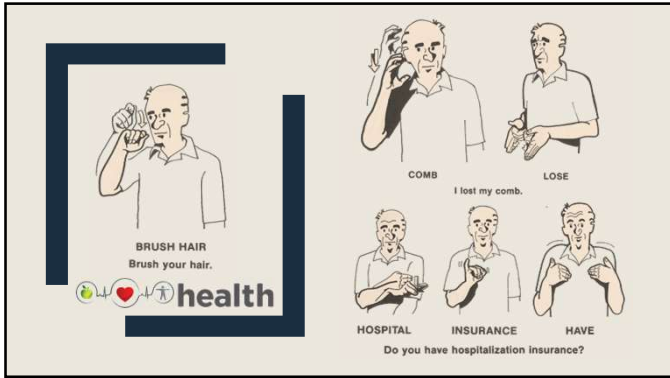
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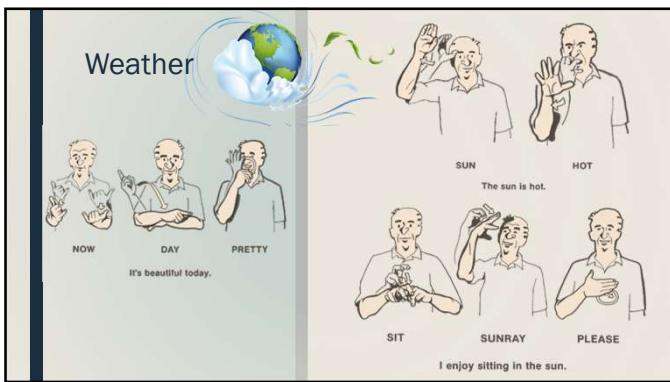
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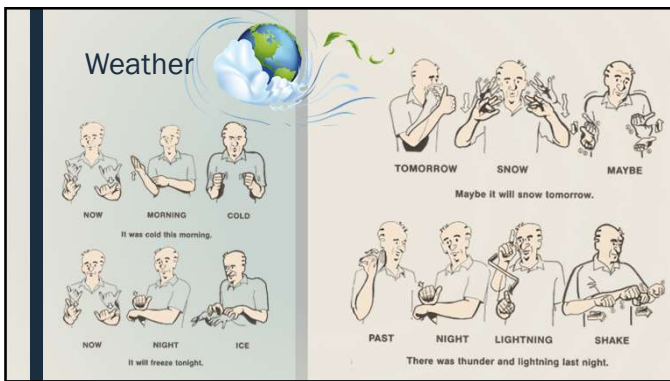
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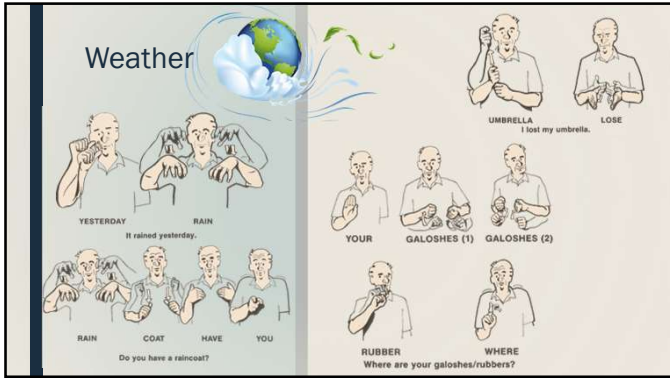
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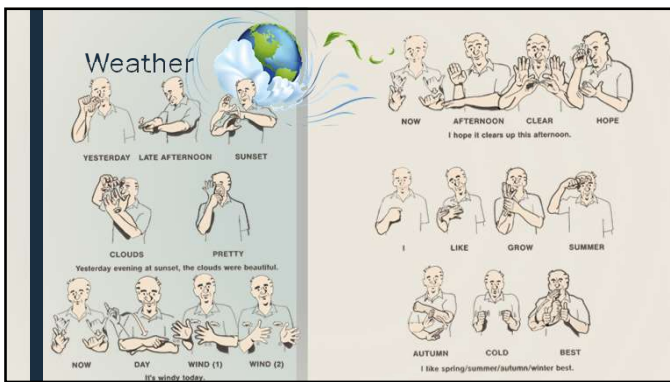
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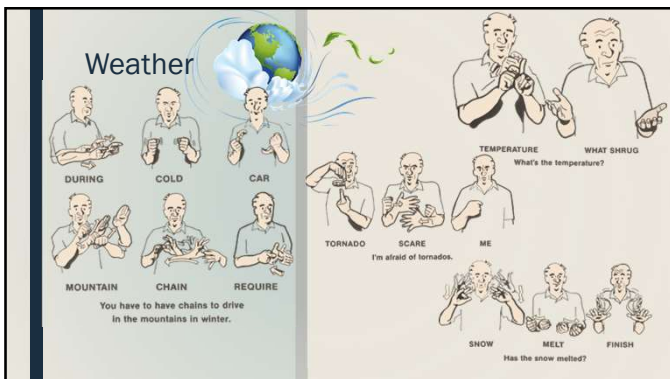
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**Weather**

**EARTH**  
SHAKE  
LAST YEAR WATER FLOOD  
There was a flood last year.

**FINISH**  
YOU  
Have you ever been in an earthquake?

**TEMPERATURE** **LESS THAN** **ZERO**  
The temperature is below zero.

\* There are no signs for "hurricane," "blizzard," "sleet," and "hail," so they must be fingerspelled.

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**YOU** **FACE** **AS**  
**YOUR** **MOTHER**  
You look like your mother.

**YOUR** **FATHER** **FACE** **NICE**  
Your father is nice-looking.

**FAMILY**

95

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**MY** **SISTER** **SKILL** **TALK**  
**FEW** **LANGUAGE** **SKILL**  
My sister speaks several languages fluently.

**MY** **BROTHER** **YOUNGER**  
**THAN** **I**  
My brother is younger than I.

**FAMILY**

\* The repetition of a sign, as SKILL is repeated here, is a common practice.

96

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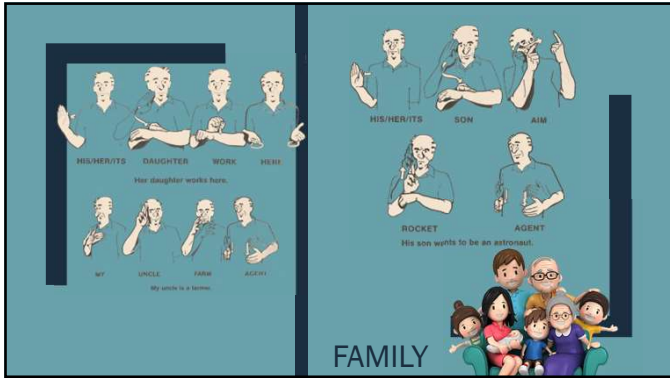
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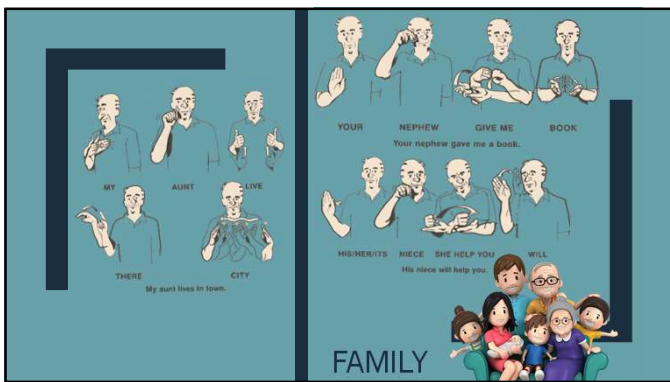
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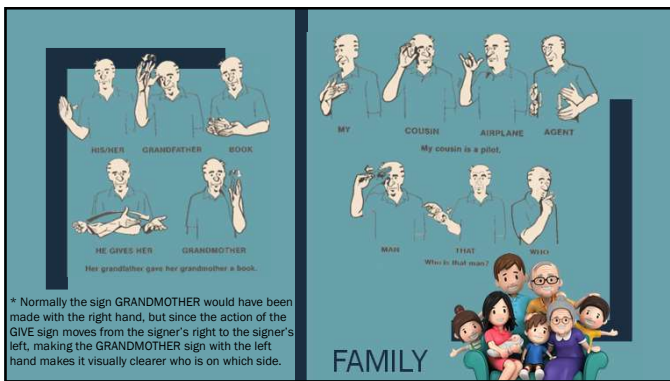
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\* Normally the sign GRANDMOTHER would have been made with the right hand, but since the action of the GIVE sign moves from the signer's right to the signer's left, making the GRANDMOTHER sign with the left hand makes it visually clearer who is on which side.

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GIRL HE/SHE/IT TELL BOY  
HE/SHE/IT LOVE HIM/HER/IT  
WOMAN SEE FINISH  
BABY SWEET

The girl told the boy that she loves him.  
Did you see the woman?  
The baby is cute.

**FAMILY**

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FATHER TELL BOY  
SHORT (height) PLAY OUT  
GIRL SHORT (height) HIM/HER/IT  
DOLL BREAK

Father told the little boy to play outside.  
The little girl's doll is broken.

**FAMILY**

101

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WE CONVEYE GRANDFATHER  
FARM THERE  
CHILDREN COME HERE HOW MANY  
PAST SUMMER FAMILY CONVEYE  
OUR FAMILY LARGE SMALL

We met at Grandfather's farm.  
We had a family reunion last summer.  
Our family is large/small.

**FAMILY**

102

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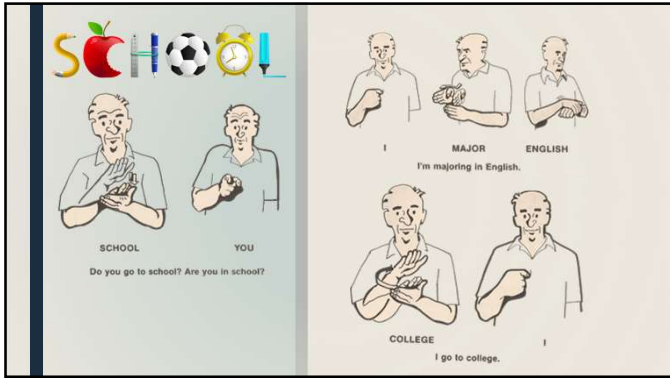
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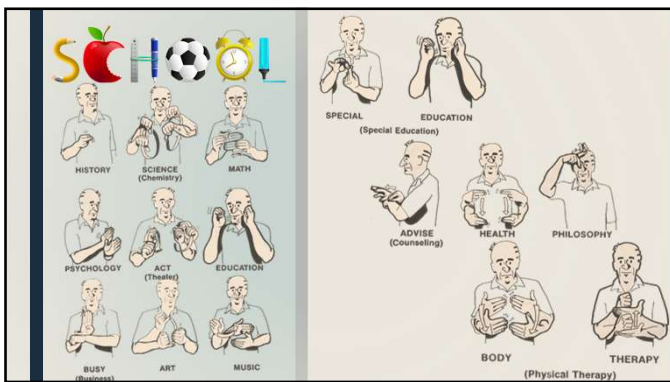
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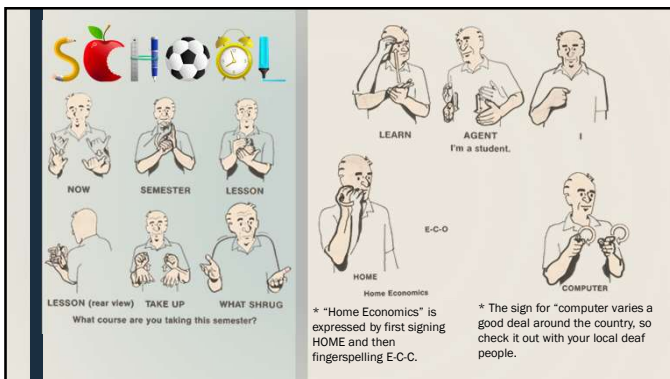
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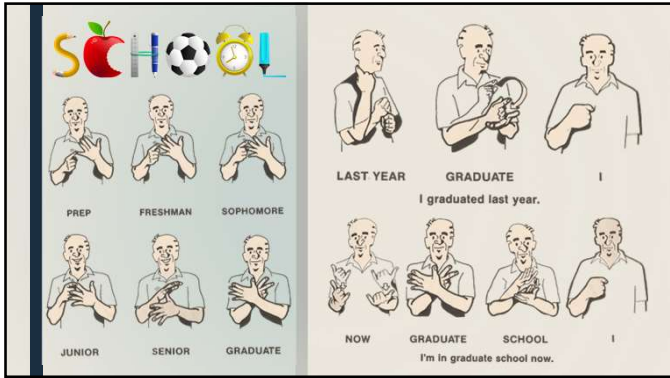
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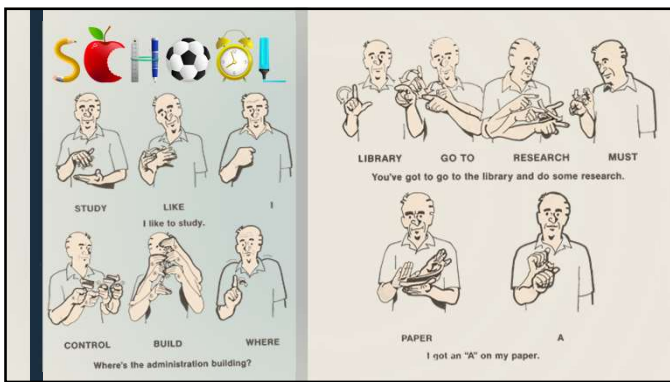
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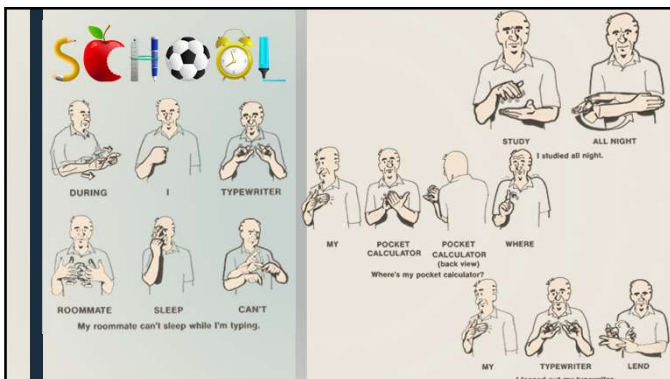
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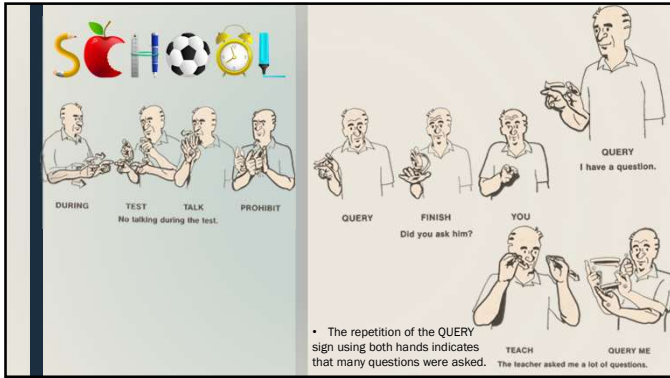
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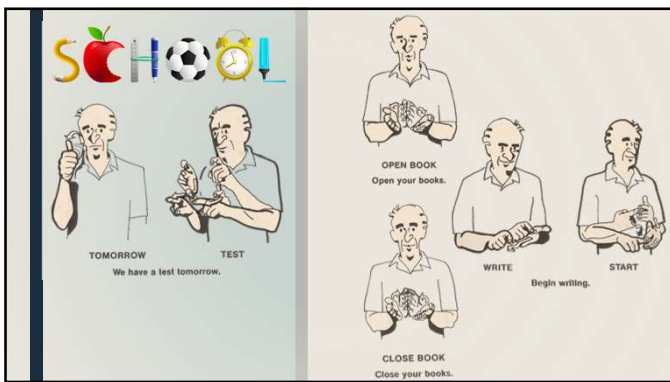
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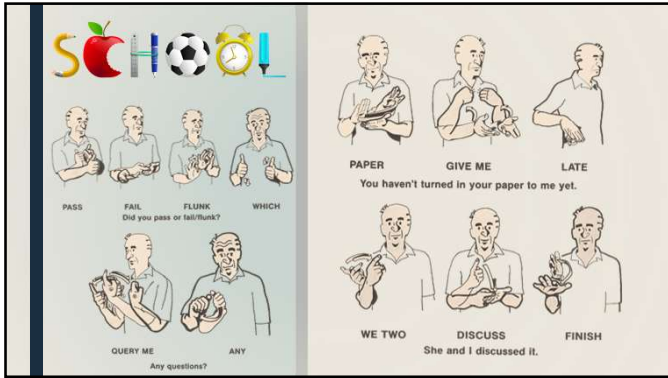
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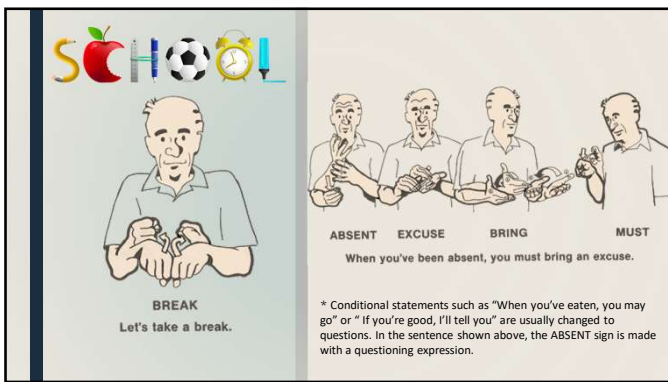
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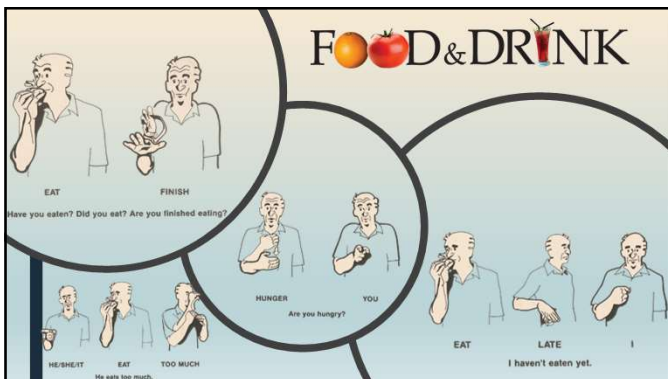
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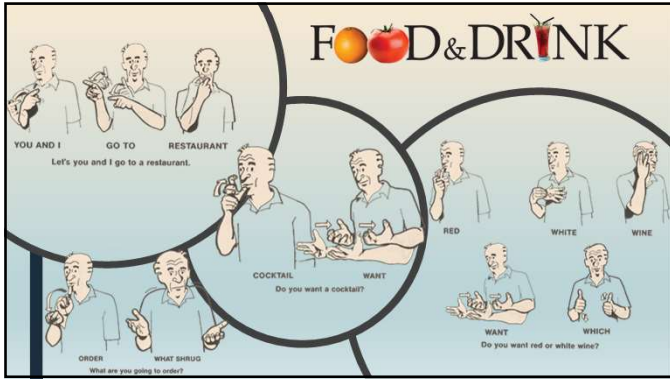
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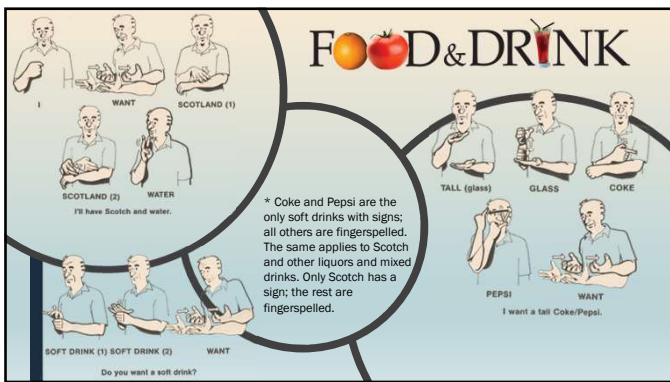
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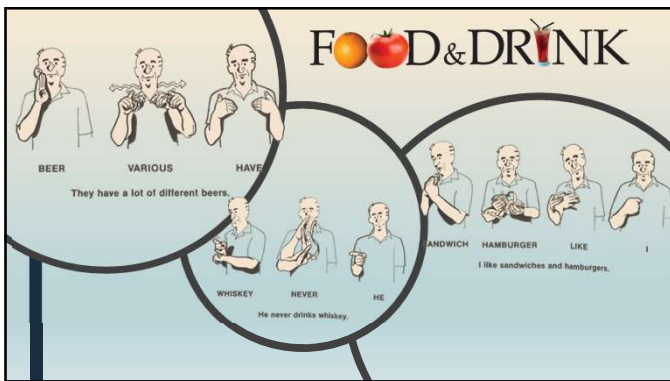
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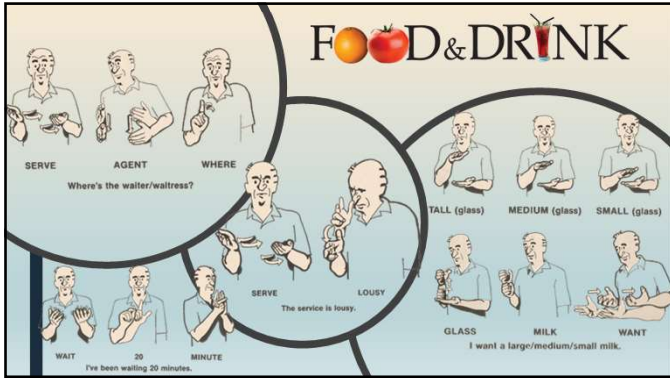
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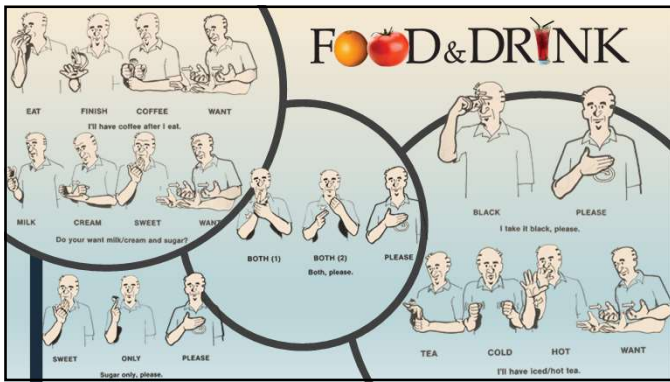
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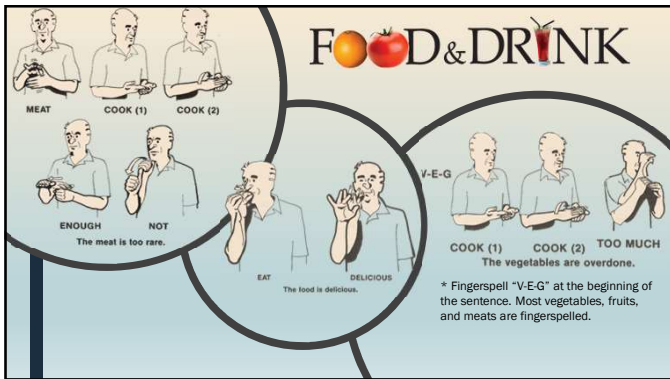
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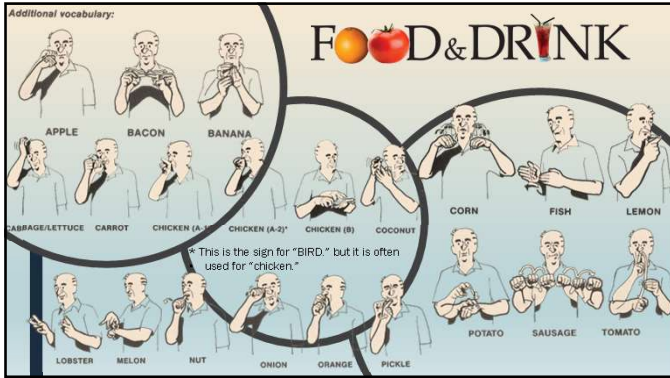
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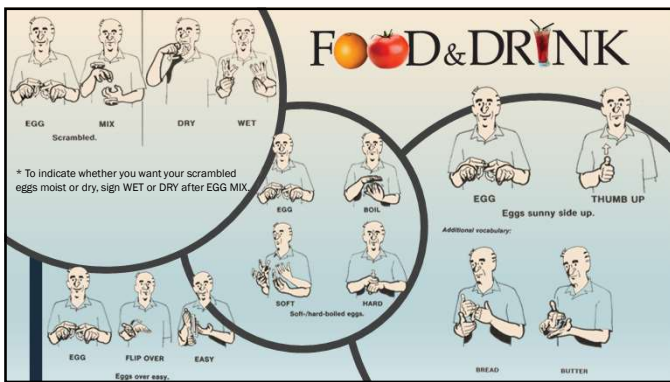
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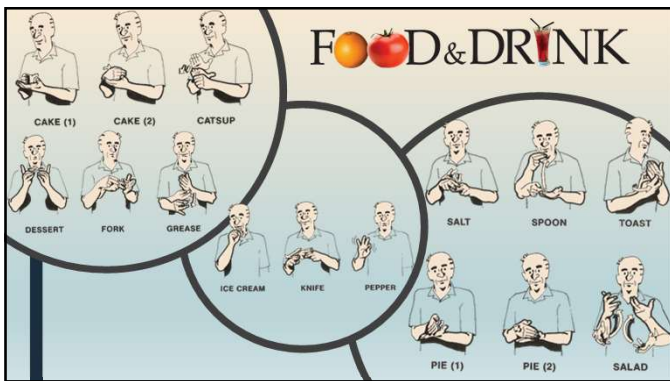
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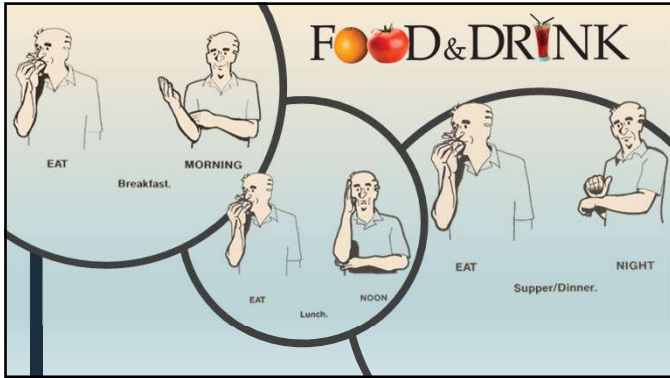
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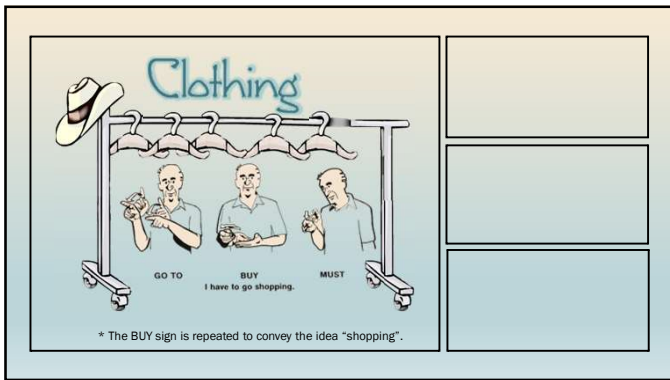
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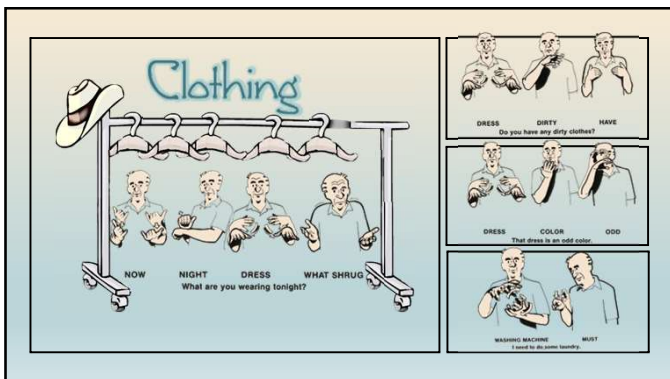
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**Clothing**

WASHING MACHINE  
Is there a laundromat nearby?

NEAR

\* The NEAR sign is done so that the hand do not actually touch each other.

DRESS  
He always dresses nicely.

NICE  
He always dresses nicely.

ALWAYS  
He always dresses nicely.

NE-SHE-IT

SHIRT  
TIE  
OPPOSITE  
The shirt and tie don't match.

BLUE  
AGREE  
Wear agree with you.

\* Ordinarily the AGREE sign just moves downward, but when it is used in this expression, it must move toward the watcher.

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**Clothing**

NOW  
DAY  
MOST

WOMAN  
USE  
SLACKS  
Most women wear slacks nowadays.

BOW TIE  
TIE KNOT  
I can't tie a bow tie.

MY PANTS  
My trousers are torn.

RIP

S-U-T-T-O-N

SEW  
CAN YOU  
Can you sew on a button for me?

CANT

\* Fingerspell BUTON at the beginning of the sentence before the sign SEW.

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**Clothing**

DURING  
SUMMER  
SHORTS

EVERY DAY  
I  
I wear shorts every day in the summer.

SHIRT  
WASH CLOTHES  
I need to wash out my shirt.

SOCKS  
SAME  
Your socks don't match.

NOT

SHIRT  
SHOES  
Shirt and shoes are required.

REQUIRE

SHIRT  
WASH CLOTHES  
I need to wash out my shirt.

MUST

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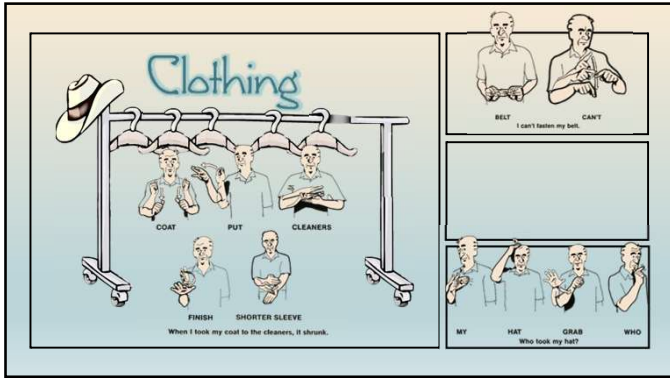
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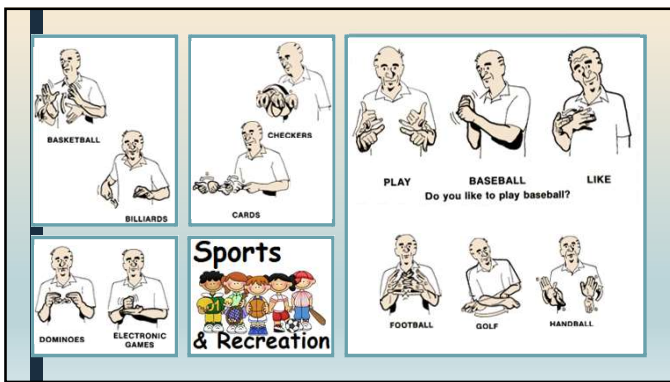
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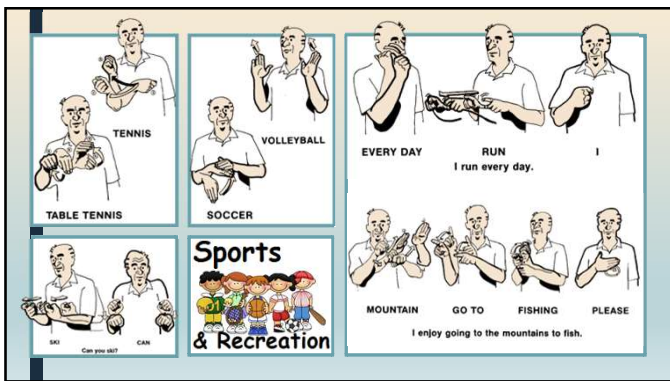
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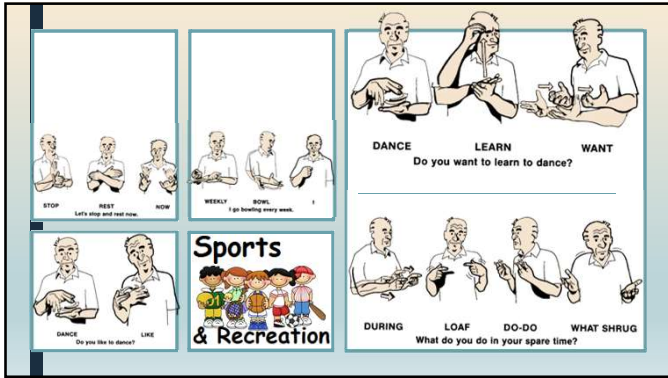
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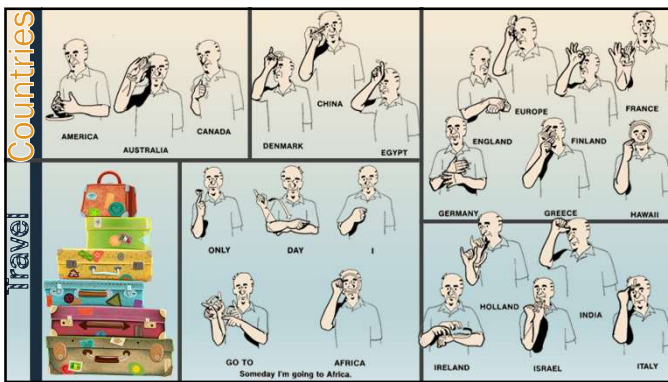
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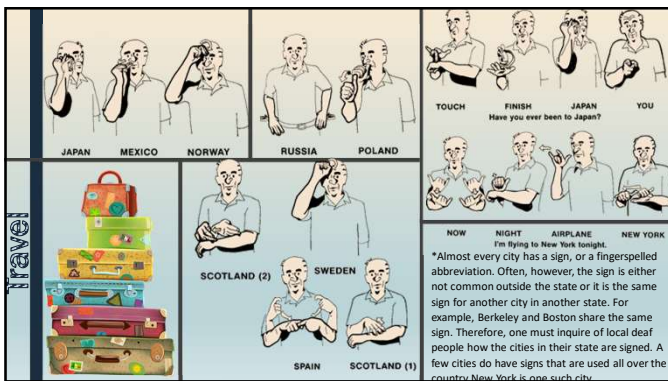
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Travel	<p>ATLANTA CHICAGO MILWAUKEE NEW ORLEANS PHILADELPHIA PITTSBURGH SAN FRANCISCO WASHINGTON</p>		
	<p>*San Francisco is abbreviated to "SF." And so are many other cities. Take care with Los Angeles, since its abbreviation can also mean Louisiana.</p>		
Travel	<p>PACK BAGS Are your bags packed? FINISH</p>		
	<p>SIT APPOINTMENT NOT The seats are not reserved.</p>		

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Travel	<p>TICKET HAVE AIRPLANE TAKE-OFF TIME</p>		
	<p>Do you have your ticket? What time does the plane take off?</p>		
Travel	<p>AIRPLANE CHANGE (1) CHANGE (2) IN CHICAGO MUST</p>		
	<p>I have to change planes in Chicago.</p>		
Travel	<p>BRING AIRPLANE I'll take you to the airport. WAIT TWO HOURS</p>		
	<p>There's a two-hour layover.</p>		

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Travel	<p>TICKET LET'S SEE PLEASE</p>		
	<p>May I see your ticket, please?</p>		
Travel	<p>AIRPLANE CLOSE BECAUSE F-O-G</p>		
	<p>The airport is closed due to fog. * There is no sign for "fog," so fingerspell it at the end of the sentence, after the sign BECAUSE.</p>		
Travel	<p>AIRPLANE TAKE-OFF POSTPONE ONE HOUR</p>		
	<p>The flight has been delayed an hour.</p>		
Travel	<p>AIRPLANE CANCEL</p>		
	<p>The flight has been canceled.</p>		

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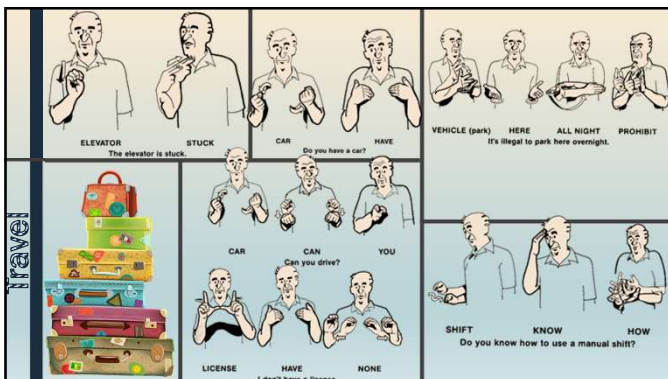
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Travel	<p>SLOW Slow down and make a right turn.                  * "RIGHT" means "as opposed to left," but "RIGHT TURN" is one sign.</p> <p>RIGHT                  RIGHT TURN*                  * "RIGHT" means "as opposed to left," but "RIGHT TURN" is one sign.</p> <p>LEFT                  LEFT TURN**                  * "LEFT" means "as opposed to right," but "LEFT TURN" is one sign.</p> <p>STOP</p>	<p>C-A-B                  PHONE BECKON PLEASE                  Would you call me a cab, please?</p>
		<p>ONLY TIME                  COME VISIT                  Come visit me sometime.</p>

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States	<p>ARIZONA CALIFORNIA HAWAII NEW YORK</p>	<p>TEXAS WASHINGTON</p>
	<p>* Almost all states are fingerspelled using the standard written abbreviations such as Penn. or Pa., N.D., and Wyo. States such as Ohio that have short names are spelled out.</p>	

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Animals, Colors		<p>ANIMAL ALLIGATOR (1) ALLIGATOR (2) BEAR (1) BEAR (2)</p>
	<p>BEE (1) BEE (2) BIRD (1) BIRD (2) BUTTERFLY                  CAMEL CAT CHICKEN COW DEER DOG EAGLE</p>	

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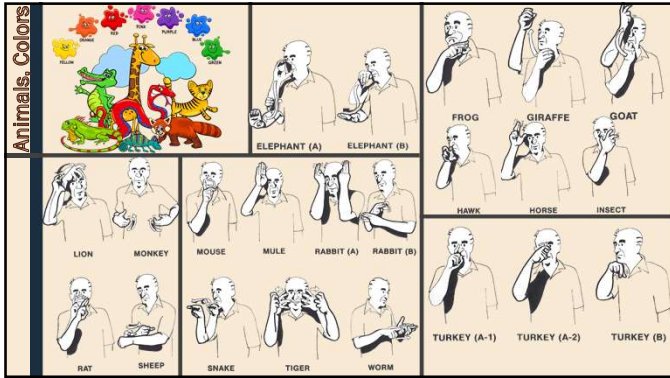
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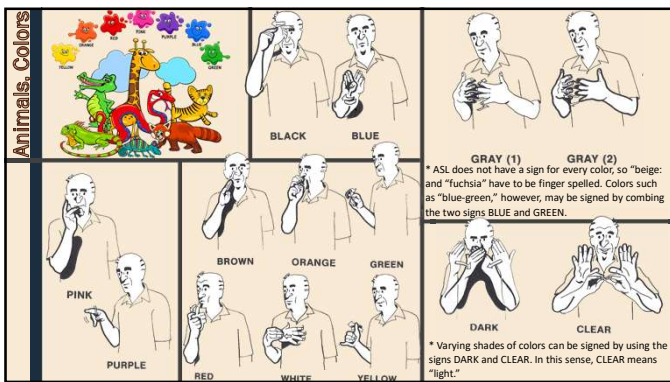
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**LAW**   **PASS**   **RESPONSIBLE**

**WHO**   **LEGISLATURE**   **CONGRESS**

The legislature/congress is responsible for passing laws.

\* This is an example of the rhetorical question, where the signer asks, then answers, the question. It is used a great deal in ASL. There is a slight pause at the end of the question-after the sign WHO in this example-and then the answer is signed.

**HE/SHE/IT**   **CONGRESS**   **WOMAN**  
She is a congresswoman.

**HE/SHE/IT**   **SENATE**   **GOVERNMENT**

**JUDGE**   **LAW**   **PLAINT**  
He is a senator/judge/lawyer.

**Civics**

\* The AGENT sign is usually done following the SENATE, GOVERNMENT, JUDGE, and LAW signs to indicate senator, governor, judge, and lawyer, respectively.

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**COST**   **PAY**   **MUST**

**WE**   **FOR**   **VEHICLE (park)**   **COST**   **PAY**

**SUPPORT**   **GOVERNMENT**  
We must pay taxes to support the government.

**MUST**  
I had to pay a parking fine.

**OUR**   **COUNTRY (A)**   **COUNTRY (B)**   **LARGE**  
Our country is large.

\* Either sign for "country" is acceptable.

**Civics**

**GOVERNMENT**   **CITY**   **NAME**   **WHAT SHOULD**  
Which city is the capital?

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**LAW**   **BREAK**   **JAIL**   **MAYBE**

If you break the law, you might go to jail.

\* The idea of "if" is often expressed in ASL by stating the sentence as a question. This requires a questioning expression done on the BREAK sign, and then a slight pause before you sign the consequence. The questioning expression happens with the MAYBE sign followed by a pause.

**LAW**   **DISOBEY**   **PUNISH**   **WILL**

If you disobey the law, you will be punished.

**LAW**   **LIKELY**   **MUST**   **YOU**  
You must obey the law.

**Civics**

**HE/SHE/IT**   **PLAN**   **AGAINST**  
She plans to sue them.

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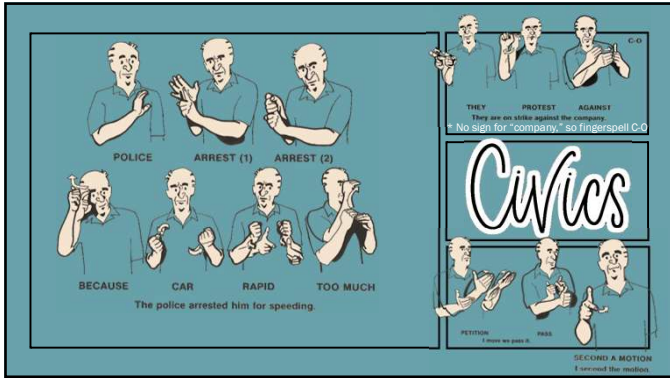
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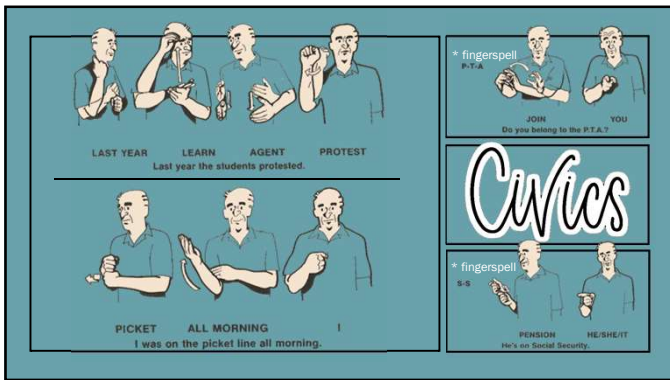
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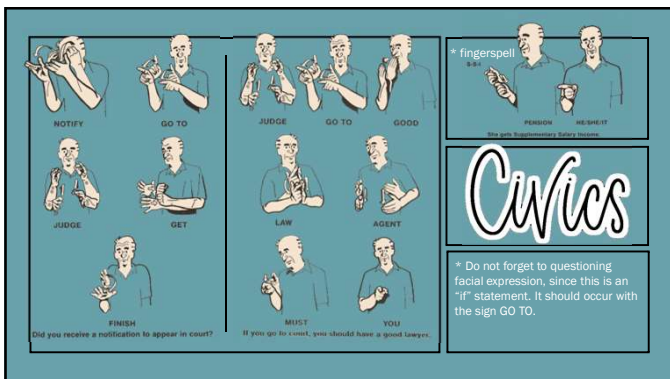
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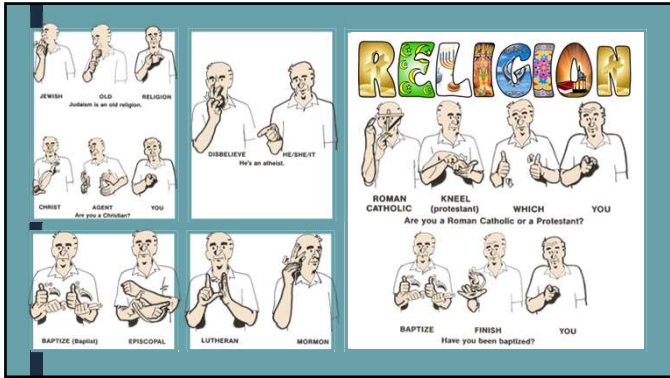
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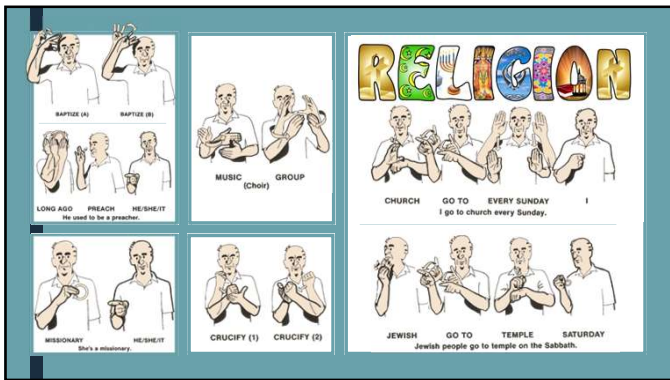
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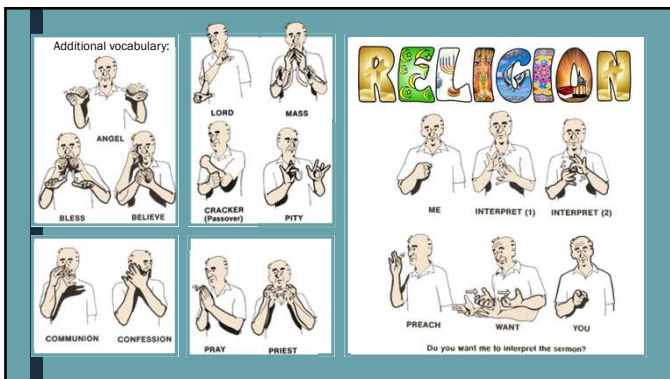
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Additional vocabulary:




PROPHECY




SIN




SAVE




RABBI




RELIGION




SOUL (A)




SOUL (B-1)




SOUL (B-2)



GET UP  
(Resurrection)



AGAIN



WORSHIP

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