

Welcome to the American Sign Language Academy
curriculum for:
American Sign Language - Level One

The video presentation you are about to use, along with these printed materials, is designed to teach you the foundation skills of American Sign Language - ASL. The majority of products offered to prospective students of ASL are reference works, such as dictionaries, that show you *what* to do, but don't teach you *how* to do it.

Realizing the need for students to be guided through the learning process, we used our level one curriculum that has been successful in our classrooms for two decades to produce this work. Our level one ASL classroom course is eighteen hours of instruction, covering exactly what you will be learning. Though the video part of this program is less than three hours long, careful teaching is provided so you will have the same success in learning as our students do in our live classrooms.

Each aspect of the language is explained and modeled for you. What is important for you as a student is to pause the presentation and take the time you need to work on your own with the vocabulary and sentence practice pages.

Be patient. Don't try to rush the process. ASL is a three-dimensional, moving language that will take some time and effort to master. Have in mind that your goal is to learn the material that would take eighteen hours in a classroom setting.

We sincerely hope you enjoy and benefit greatly from ASL Level One.

Blue Collar Linguistics

What is American Sign Language?

American Sign Language, commonly referred to as ASL, is the natural language of most deaf people in the United States and Canada. ASL is not used in other English-speaking countries in the world such as Great Britain or Australia.

ASL is a complete language. It can express any idea as fully as any spoken language. Information is received through vision and is expressed with hands and body. It is therefore categorized as a *visual-gestural* language.

While actual signs are very important in conveying information, they provide only part of the message. Facial expression and body language are vital components of ASL.

How long does it take to learn ASL? While a specific time frame cannot be given, it *can* be said that since ASL is a language, it takes as long to learn as it does to learn any other language. Factors such as natural ability, level of motivation, quality of instruction and opportunity to practice will affect your success in learning. So, it does take time, but you will find it is a rewarding and satisfying experience.

Level 1

In this introductory level, you will develop the foundation skills you need to make you successful in learning ASL. The focus of this level is forming clear handshapes for clear sign production.

Students will be presented with the following vocabulary:

The alphabet; numbers 1-99; colors; family; feelings; animals; foods; common nouns; common greetings; non-directional verbs; days of the week; months of the year, and fingerspelling. Students will practice this vocabulary in sentences and gain exposure to the first two of the eight basic ASL sentence structures - **Affirmation** and **Negation**. By the end of the course, students will have signed two short stories.

Pages 18 and 19 will summarize the development of deaf education in the United States and the start of our modern American Sign Language. This will acquaint students with the reason why ASL is still strongly connected to French Sign Language today, but has no connection to British Sign Language.

The main goal of this level is for you to produce clear, smooth handshapes. Handshapes are the same as pronunciation in a spoken language. If your handshapes are unclear, your message will be unclear. If your handshapes are clearly produced, you will be understandable.

ASL is comprised of *about* 50 handshapes. From these handshapes, an entire language is produced. How is that possible?

There are four components to an ASL sign:

HANDSHAPE

PALM POSITION

LOCATION

MOVEMENT

If you change one of these, you will change the sign into a different meaning, or nonsense. It is therefore important for you to master the handshapes of the language first. This is your “pronunciation” in ASL. Your eye will be drawn to the *motion* of signs. What is most important for you to put vocabulary into long-term memory is for you to focus on the *handshapes*. If you don’t know the handshape, you cannot produce the sign.

By learning the manual alphabet and numbers, you will gain the majority of handshapes you need. With the vocabulary you will learn at this level, you will acquire the remaining handshapes. In addition, some of these handshapes may be used as *Classifiers* - handshapes that represent an entire category of signs.

With these handshapes combined with movement, location and different palm positions, we can create many hundreds of signs. Your eye is naturally drawn to the movement. Focus first on the handshape. Adding classifiers and context, we have the means to express a complete language.

COLORS

You will learn 14 colors:

Blue, green, purple, yellow

These four are done in the same area - on the *dominant* side of the body. The *dominant* hand is the hand you write with. For signs done with one hand, this is the one you should use.

Brown, tan

These are done in the same area on the dominant side of the face.

Orange, red and pink are done in the area of the chin.

Gold and silver are done from the dominant side earlobe. White is from the chest to the front of the body. Black is on the forehead. Gray is in front of the body.

There are ways to express an endless number of shades and hues. You will learn these techniques at more advanced levels.

These tips on *location* should help you remember!

There are three types of signs in ASL: A one-handed sign, such as is used in fingerspelling and numbers; a two-handed sign that is symmetrical - both hands doing the same thing; and a two-handed sign where the *dominant* hand does all or most of the action. As you move on to learn signs for animals, notice these three types. When you aren't sure which hand to use for movement in a two-handed sign that isn't symmetrical, remember that it is the *dominant* hand.

ASLA Level 1

Colors

1. I like red
2. I like gold
3. I like brown
4. I like green
5. I like purple
6. I like orange
7. I like tan
8. I like silver
9. I like white
10. I like blue
11. I like gray
12. I like pink
13. I like black
14. I like yellow
15. I want green
16. I want yellow
17. I want purple
18. I want silver
19. I want black
20. I want brown
21. I want orange
22. I want tan
23. I want pink
24. I want gold
25. I want red
26. I want gray
27. I want white
28. I want blue
29. I have pink
30. I have blue
31. I have black
32. I have tan
33. I have orange
34. I have brown
35. I have gold
36. I have gray
37. I have red
38. I have green
39. I have yellow
40. I have silver
41. I have purple
42. I have white

Repeat these sentences until your signing is smooth and clear.

Animals

1. Animal

2. Lion

3. Tiger

4. Bear

5. Crocodile

6. Cat

7. Fox

8. Owl

9. Dog

10. Bug

11. Deer

12. Raccoon

13. Skunk

14. Turtle

15. Squirrel

16. Horse

17. Pig

18. Frog

19. Wolf

20. Elephant

21. Snake

22. Bird

23. Duck

24. Rhino

25. Hippo

26. Fish

27. Shark

28. Whale

29. Dolphin

30. Eagle

31. Octopus

32. Sheep

33. Goat

34. Butterfly

35. Turkey

36. Spider

37. Sea Turtle

38. Rabbit

39. Rat

40. Mouse

41. Giraffe

42. Cow

43. Monkey

44. Gorilla

45. Worm

46. Zebra

47. Seal

48. Penguin

ASLA Level 1

1. I like lions
2. I like tigers
3. I like bears
4. I like crocodiles / alligators
5. I like cats
6. I like foxes
7. I like owls
8. I like dogs
9. I like bugs
10. I like deer
11. I like raccoon
12. I like skunks
13. I like turtles
14. I like squirrels
15. I like horses
16. I like pigs
17. I like wolves

18. _____

19. _____

20. _____

21. _____

22. _____

23. _____

24. _____

Create new sentences by substituting different signs

ASLA Level 1

1. My lion yellow
2. My tiger orange
3. My bear black
4. My skunk white
5. My raccoon tan
6. My deer brown
7. My bug silver
8. My dog white
9. My owl pink
10. My fox gold
11. My cat purple
12. My crocodile/alligator
green
13. My turtle black
14. My squirrel red
15. My horse brown
16. My pig pink
17. My frog yellow
18. My wolf gray
19. My eagle gold
20. My dolphin blue
21. My whale white
22. My shark tan
23. My fish age 27
24. My hippo age 25
25. My rhino age 16
26. My duck age 4
27. My bird age 3
28. My snake age 13
29. My elephant age 29
30. My octopus age 66
31. My goat age 21
32. My sheep age 55
33. My butterfly age 19
34. My turkey age 86
35. My spider age 14
36. My worm age 1
37. My gorilla age 11
38. My monkey age 12
39. My cow age 23
40. My giraffe age 28
41. My mouse age 44
42. My rat age 25
43. My rabbit age 21
44. My sea turtle age 23

Foods, Drinks

WORDS THAT ARE HYPENATED MUST BE FINGERSPELLED

- | | | |
|-------------|---------------|----------------|
| 1. Coffee | | |
| 2. Cream | 18. Peach | 35. Soup |
| 3. Sugar | 19. Tomato | 36. Pie |
| 4. Milk | 20. Fruit | 37. Water |
| 5. Cereal | 21. Cheese | 38. C-O-K-E |
| 6. Eggs | 22. Chicken | 39. Pepsi |
| 7. Bacon | 23. Steak | 40. Soda |
| 8. Sausage | 24. Fish | 41. Onion |
| 9. Toast | 25. Turkey | 42. Hot Dog |
| 10. Bread | 26. Sandwich | 43. Hamburger |
| 11. Butter | 27. Vegetable | 44. Peanut |
| 12. Muffin | 28. Potato | 45. Jelly |
| 13. Pancake | 29. Corn | 46. Melon |
| 14. Tea | 30. Peas | 47. Watermelon |
| 15. Juice | 31. Carrots | 48. Ice Cream |
| 16. Orange | 32. Lettuce | 49. Candy |
| 17. Banana | 33. Salad | 50. Gum |
| | 34. Pizza | |

Create new sentences by substituting different signs

ASLA Level 1

Sentence type: Affirmation

1. I want coffee
2. I want bacon
3. I want eggs
4. I want salad
5. I want cereal
6. I want milk
7. I want sugar
8. I want cream
9. I want cheese
10. I want fruit
11. I want tomato
12. I want apple
13. I want peach
14. I want banana
15. I want orange
16. I want juice
17. I want tea
18. I want hot dog
19. I want turkey
20. I want candy
21. I want peas
22. I want potato
23. I want hamburger
24. I want spaghetti
25. I want sandwich
26. I want pancake
27. _____
28. _____
29. _____
30. _____

Create new sentences by substituting different signs

Family and relationships

1. Girl
2. Boy
3. Mother
4. Father
5. Grandma
6. Grandpa
7. Woman
8. Man
9. Aunt
10. Uncle
11. Niece
12. Nephew
13. Cousin
14. In-law
15. Daughter
16. Son
17. G-R-A-N-D daughter
18. G-R-A-N-D son
19. Wife
20. Husband
21. Sister
22. Brother
23. Divorce
24. Separate
25. Marry

Hyphenated letters (s-t-e-p) indicates this is fingerspelled.

Hyphenated words (in-law) indicate this is a single sign.

ASLA Level 1

1. My sister age 19
2. My aunt age 72
3. My niece age 10
4. My grandma age 93
5. My wife age 25
6. My daughter age 28
7. My mother age 63
8. Woman age 36
9. My brother age 47
10. My nephew age 17
11. My grandpa age 87
12. My father age 69
13. My uncle age 66
14. My husband age 29
15. My son age 23
16. Girl age 13
17. Boy age 8
18. Man age 39
19. My g-r-a-n-d daughter
age 9
20. My g-r-a-n-d son age 12
21. My mother-in-law age 46
22. My sister-in-law age 23
23. My cousin age 21

Practice until the signs are produced smoothly and easily.
Now sign through number 23 by replacing “age” from the top half of the
page with “like food” or “like drink”.

1. My sister like (food/drink)
2. My aunt like (food/drink)
3. My niece like (food/drink)
4. My grandma like (food/drink)
5. My wife like (food/drink...continue through number 23)

Verbs

1. Run
2. Walk
3. Jump
4. Dance
5. Sing
6. Swim
7. Play
8. Drive
9. Write
10. Draw
11. Sleep
12. Cook
13. Laugh
14. Eat
15. Drink
16. Read
17. Bike
18. Sit
19. Count
20. Paint
21. Visit
22. Stand
23. Work
24. Talk
25. See

26. Learn
27. Study
28. Teach
29. Know
30. Don't-Know
31. Like
32. Don't-Like
33. Want
34. Don't-Want
35. Have

Feelings

1. Emotion
2. Angry
3. Hungry
4. Happy
5. Sad
6. Tired
7. Surprised
8. Bored
9. Afraid
10. Nervous
11. Excited
12. Enjoy
13. Thirsty

Other Vocabulary

1. Deaf
2. Hearing (person)
3. Hard-Of-Hearing
4. No
5. Yes
6. Love (2)
7. Hate
8. Bad
9. Good
10. Understand
11. Stop
12. Voice-Off
13. Please
14. Again / Repeat
15. Forgive / Excuse
16. Can
17. Can't

ASLA Level 1

Sentence practice using the sentence structure:

Affirmation

- | | |
|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. My turtle jumps. | 12. My grandmother sits. |
| 2. My aunt works. | 13. My cousin is writing. |
| 3. My sister laughs. | 14. My nephew stands. |
| 4. My brother dances. | 15. My family bikes. |
| 5. My niece draws. | 16. My cousin plays. |
| 6. My father walks. | 17. My uncle eats. |
| 7. My mother swims. | 18. My snake swims. |
| 8. My grandmother bikes. | 19. My bird dances. |
| 9. My mother reads. | 20. My bear sleeps. |
| 10. My grandmother cooks. | 21. My dog talks. |
| 11. My grandfather drives. | 22. My uncle runs. |

Create new sentences by substituting other signs.

AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE ACADEMY LEVEL 1
FIRST STORY

1) My name _____

2) I age _____
(1 - 99)

3) I like _____, _____
(color) (color)

4) I like _____
(animal)

5) I want _____
(animal)

6) I like _____
(food)

7) I like _____
(drink)

8) My _____ Name _____
(family member)

9) She / He age _____

10) She / He has _____
(animal)

11) She / He wants _____
(animal)

12) She / He likes _____
(food)

13) She / He likes _____
(drink)

“She” and “He” are indicated by pointing to an area in front of you, on the side of your dominant hand. This is called **Spatial Referencing**. This is how pronouns are indicated in ASL.

AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE ACADEMY LEVEL 1
SECOND STORY

- 1) Hello, my name (first and last) _____
- 2) I born (month, day, year) _____
- 3) I age _____
- 4) I live town _____
- 5) My favorite color _____
- 6) I don't-like (color) _____
- 7) I like (animal) _____
- 8) I don't-like (animal) _____
- 9) (day) _____, I (verb) _____
- 10) (day) _____, I eat _____
- 11) (day) _____, I drink _____
- 12) I enjoy (verb) _____
- 13) My favorite food _____
- 14) I (profession) _____
- 15) My (family member) _____ Name (first) _____
- 16) She / He age _____
- 17) She / He lives town _____
- 18) She / He likes (verb) _____
- 19) She / He doesn't-like (verb) _____
- 20) She / He (feeling) _____
- 21) She / He (profession) _____

The pronouns "she" and "he" are indicated by pointing to an area in front of you, on the side of your dominant hand. This is called **Spatial Referencing**.

Historic Milestones

In the early 1800's, there were no schools for the deaf in the United States. Europe had established schools in Great Britain, Germany and France.

Dr. Mason Cogswell had a deaf daughter, Alice, and was concerned for her future. He helped to organize a group of parents in New England who were also concerned about educating their deaf children. They eventually enlisted the help of Thomas Gallaudet. Thomas agreed to travel to Europe to observe the deaf schools there, learn their methods of teaching, and come back to open a school for the deaf in America.

Thomas traveled to England. The schools there were run by the Braidwood family and used the *oral method* of teaching - no signing - only speech. Thomas was dismayed to see the gloomy atmosphere in the school he visited, and students looked unhappy. It didn't look like a learning environment. He was discouraged and ready to head home.

Walking along the street in London, he saw a flyer advertising a demonstration of French Sign Language that would be put on by representatives of a school for the deaf in Paris. He went and saw the French teachers Jean Massieu and Laurent Clerc, both of them deaf, and the headmaster of the school, Abbé Sicard, a hearing man, acting as interpreter. He was fascinated and asked if he could visit the school in Paris.

A short time later, Thomas was thrilled to see the French deaf students signing and looking cheerful. The classrooms and walls were filled with evidence of their learning. "This", he thought, "is the kind of school we need in America". But Thomas was not a teacher of the deaf and didn't know any signs. How could he possibly do it? He would need help.

He asked Laurent Clerc to come with him to America. Laurent had many reasons to say no. The school in Paris, from which he had graduated, was his second family and his home. He was a successful teacher there, surrounded by an entire community of people with whom he could

communicate easily and freely. Going to America, he would be the only educated deaf person in the country, since there were no schools. He was Catholic and would be going to a Protestant country. This was an important consideration, since his school was run by the church and had given him so much. It would seem like a betrayal. In addition, his teacher and mentor, Jean Massieu, was not well and was increasingly dependent on Laurent. Could he leave him? This would not be an easy decision.

Thomas told him how difficult it was in America without an education and that the situation for deaf people was not good. Clerc was the one who could make such a difference in the lives of so many. Clerc finally agreed to come to America for a year to help the school get established. He would train Thomas and then would come back to his home, France.

Clerc came to America and stayed his whole life, visiting his French homeland a few times. He had found so many reasons to stay in America. In establishing the school, he was doing what had been done in France - establishing a community. He was also doing something else that he didn't realize at first. While he was using his French Sign Language (LSF), his new students were using the language they had developed, which we might call Old American Sign Language, and the two languages began to merge and form a brand new language - our modern ASL.

For 50 years, every new deaf school that opened in the United States used the ASL that was developed at that first school in Hartford, CT. Deaf people were successful and well-integrated into American society. Unfortunately, this would change later, when oral schools began to open in America in 1867. For the next 100 years, no signing schools would open in America, and those that had previously used ASL were changed into oral schools by their hearing headmasters.

Portraits in Print

Laurent Clerc

Born in France in 1785

Died in Hartford, CT in 1869

When Laurent was about a year old, he fell from his high chair into the kitchen fireplace. His right cheek was severely burned, and he sustained a high fever. Later, it was discovered that his senses of hearing and smell were damaged. His name sign, an “h” handshape brushed downward on the right cheek, is derived from the noticeable scar there.

At twelve years old, he went to the school for the deaf in Paris, Institut National des Jeune Sourds-Muets. This was the first known public school for the deaf in the world. There he met his first teacher, Jean Massieu, a deaf teacher who became Laurent’s mentor and friend and a second father to him.

Laurent excelled in his studies and went on to become a teacher at the school. In 1816, he met Thomas Gallaudet and eventually, Laurent came with Gallaudet to America to help establish the first permanent school for the deaf, in Hartford, CT.

The school opened in 1817 and was highly successful. Laurent went on to assist other schools for the deaf, and tirelessly worked to better the lives of deaf Americans. He appeared before the U.S. congress in 1820 to lobby for funds to support the new schools and open additional ones.

A number of Clerc’s students went on to teach or become headmasters at other schools. A statue honoring Clerc can be seen on the campus of the American School for the Deaf today. Part of the inscription reads: “Laurent Clerc, apostle to the deaf in America”. Without him, deaf education and American Sign Language would not exist as it does today.

Portraits in Print

Thomas Gallaudet

Born in Philadelphia, PA in 1787

Died in Hartford, CT in 1851

Young Thomas went to Yale College (now University) and was planning to be a minister. After graduating, he was back at home in Hartford, when he encountered a new neighbor, Alice Cogswell, nine years old. Alice was deaf. After struggling to communicate with her, he was intrigued about how to teach the deaf. Alice's father, Dr. Mason Cogswell, along with other parents of deaf children from New England, sponsored Thomas to travel to Europe and see the methods used to educate the deaf.

Arriving in London, Thomas got to see a school run by the Braidwood family. He was disappointed. The children looked unhappy. The rooms were stark. The teachers taught using speech - the method we call Oralism - and no signs. As he was pondering what to do, he saw a flyer. Visitors from the school for the deaf in Paris were visiting and were doing an exhibition demonstrating French Sign Language. Thomas decided to attend.

He was impressed and asked if he could visit their school. Soon, they were in Paris. Thomas was delighted to see the bright rooms with learning materials and students who were animated and engaged. They were signing. "This", he thought, "is what we need in America". Thomas, however, did not know how to sign. How could he teach? He knew he would need assistance.

He worked to convince Laurent Clerc, a gifted deaf teacher, to come with him to America to provide education for the deaf there. After much deliberation, Clerc agreed to come and help get the school started, and then he would return to his home in France.

Thomas was the headmaster and worked throughout his life to promote deaf education in America. The first college for the deaf in the world opened in Washington, DC in 1864 - Gallaudet College (now University) - and is named to honor him.

ASLA Level 1

Numbers

Some tips about numbers in ASL:

- Numbers 1 - 5, just counting, the palm should face you. For other numbering systems like age and time, the palm should face out.
- 6 - a little finger touches the thumb. 7 - the next finger over touches the thumb. 8 - the next finger. 9 - the first finger touches the thumb.
- 11 - "flick" the first finger forward with the palm facing you.
- 12 - flick the first two fingers forward.
- 16 - is the same handshape as 6 with a movement added. Twist the wrist. Start with the palm facing you and twist it so the palm ends up facing out. 17 is like 7 but with the twist. 18 is like 8 but with the twist, and 19 is like 9 but with the twist.
- 20 - make a "g" handshape and close it twice.
- 21 - make an "L" handshape and wiggle the thumb.
- 22 - the handshape "2" with two movements. Put the first 2 at the center of your body and move it to the outside of your dominant side.
- 23 - "3" handshape. Wiggle the middle finger up and down.
- 25 - "5" handshape. Wiggle the middle finger up and down.
- 24 and 26-29 - look like L4, L6, L7, L8, L9
- 30 to 98 - just sign the individual digits. The exceptions are numbers that repeat the same digit - 33, 44, 55.....99. Those use the same movement as the number 22.
- For compound numbers - example: For the year 1982, sign 19-8-2, not 1-9-8-2. For the year 1916, 19-16, not 1-9-1-6. When signing 16-19 as part of a compound number, do not "shake" as you would if signing 16-19 by themselves. Do them with a single movement.
- For age, sign "age", then the number.
- For time, sign "time", then the number. 10:05 would be signed "time 10-0-5". 10:21 would be signed "time 10-21". 10:30 - "time 10-30".