Background Information for Students

Dear students, we hereby provide you with general information about Dutch Sign Language. We hope to answer your most frequently asked questions and guide you to more information for those who need it.

Best of luck.

Nienke Fluitman

Information: Signing Can Be Done in Many Ways!

Different modalities

Signs are used and employed in different ways in communication. We would like to mention some methods here so that you can understand the differences and make an informed choice.

Dutch Sign Language (NGT)

This real language is spoken with the hands; facial expressions and posture are part of the language. The spoken component with voice is not part of the language. NGT is the native language of people born deaf.

Dutch with Signs (NmG)

This is based on the spoken Dutch language, supporting what is said with a sign. These signs come from the actual sign language (NGT). NmG has different forms, from very strict to very free. This refers to the number of signs used for support: strict - every word is supported, to free - only some words are supported. There is no single unambiguous way of NmG.

Communicating with Signs

This is the most free form of supporting spoken Dutch with a sign from Dutch Sign Language. This form of using signs is generally only applied for hearing people who gain more insight into communication when a sign is made while speaking, or because demonstrating making a sign leads to being able to produce a sign themselves.

History of Dutch Sign Language

Wherever people live together, communication emerges; hearing people start speaking with each other and deaf people start signing with each other.

A bird's-eye view of the highs and lows from the history of Dutch Sign Language:

1760 - De l'Épée, a French monk, begins sign language education in Paris.

1784 - Guyot, a Dutch monk, meets De l'Épée and becomes his apprentice.

1790 - Guyot establishes the first deaf institute in the Netherlands, in Groningen.

1880 - Congress of Milan, hearing teachers decide that sign language is no longer allowed!

1963 - William Stokoe, a linguist from the United States, proves: Sign language is a real language.

1981 - Start of research into Dutch Sign Language.

1997 - Report "More than a Sign" directed to the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science and the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport.

2001 - Follow-up report appears on the report "More than a Sign".

2003 - European Parliament accepts report; recognition of sign language as official minority language one step closer.

2009 - To date, a struggle for recognition of Dutch Sign Language (NGT).

2009 - October, publication of the 'Van Dalen Sign Dictionary' containing 3000 standardized signs.

2012 - The rise of 'Deaf Empowerment', also called the Deaf Spring.
For more information, visit www.deafempowerment.org

2021 - In March, the King signed the legal recognition of NGT!

Sign language emerges naturally wherever deaf people meet each other. Sign language is a living language that develops just like any other language. So we still see new signs appearing and old signs disappearing.

Information 'Basic Elements of a Sign'

When you start signing, you must offer the correct sign in its proper form to the client. However, the client will often not adopt the sign in that correct form. The client may not be able to do this yet.

A sign is composed of several basic elements: movement, handshape, location, palm and finger orientation, and facial expression/posture. The combination of these different components creates a sign.

Movement of the sign:

When you make a sign, the movement of your hands is a component of the sign. For example: KIJKEN (English: LOOK) - hand moves forward.

Handshape:

Each sign has a specific handshape, some more difficult than others. For example: DRINKEN (English: DRINK) - C-hand; WIE (English: WHO) - 1-hand.

Location:

All signs are made at a specific location. This can be in front of the body (neutral space), next to the mouth, in front of the face, etc. For example: WONEN (English: TO LIVE/RESIDE) - next to mouth.

Palm and finger orientation:

When you make a sign, your fingers and palms point in a certain direction. Upward, left, etc. For example: WAAR (English: WHERE) - palms up, fingers pointing forward.

Facial expression and posture:

These basic elements, facial expression and posture, can give extra meaning to a sign and show the degree of emotion.

Worksheet 'Sign of the Lesson' (example)

Choose one of the signs you learned this lesson. Describe the different elements of the sign below.

WONEN (TO LIVE/RESIDE)

Handshape: T0-hand

Location: Next to mouth

Movement: Hand taps 2 times

Palm and finger orientation: Palm direction is to the left,

Fingers point upward.

Facial expression and posture: Neutral

TIP: Don't forget to make your hand 'neutral' to determine the direction of palm and fingers.

Sentence Structure in NGT

As you have read in the previously described brief history of NGT, the language has not existed for very long. This has consequences for research into the language. There have not yet been many studies completed.

This does not mean that nothing is known about, for example, the sentence structure of NGT. (During your practice, you will notice that the grammar of NGT is different from Dutch.) Below you will find brief information about the rules found in NGT so far.

A standard sentence in NGT has the following order:

TIME - INDEX - NOUN - ADJECTIVE - VERB - QUESTION WORD

Or

TIME - INDEX - NOUN -

ADJECTIVE - VERB - INDEX REPETITION

An example:

Dutch: Ik ga morgen verhuizen (English: I am moving tomorrow)

NGT: : MORGEN IK VERHUIZEN IK (English: TOMORROW I MOVE I)

Another example:

Dutch: Kan jij overmorgen dat blauwe boek meenemen? (English: Can you bring that blue book the day after tomorrow?)

NGT: OVERMORGEN JIJ BOEK BLAUW MEENEMEN JIJ? (English: DAY-AFTER-TOMORROW YOU BOOK BLUE BRING YOU?)

During practice within this course, we have regularly paid attention to sentence structure within NGT. Other rules and exceptions have also been covered. Within the review lessons, we advise you to only use the basic form described above.

If you want more information about sentence structure, you could consult the following book:

Gebarentaalwetenschap *een inleiding*
Redactie: Anne Baker, Beppie van den Bogaerde, Roland Pfau, Trude Schermer
ISBN: 978-90-77822-33-3

Additional Information NGT

http://www.gebareninzicht.nl/

The site where you can find everything about Dutch Sign Language. On this website, knowledge about sign language is presented in sign language. The deaf community is often involved in research because recordings of deaf people are made for linguistic research. When the research is finished and published, it is only accessible to linguists. This website wants to make knowledge about sign language available to the deaf community by offering information primarily in sign language.

What is sign language?

"Sign language is the natural language of people born deaf." Sign language is a visual language. The language is made visible by hands, facial expressions, and posture. Dutch Sign Language is a full-fledged language, a

language with its own grammar. The signs that belong to sign language are different from signs that hearing people use when they make spontaneous gestures while speaking.

Sign languages are different all over the world; you speak the sign language of the country where you are born. It is a natural language; the language was not invented but arose naturally. There are around 6,000 living spoken languages, and as far as we know so far, about 140 sign languages. (The count is now at 140, and has grown from 120 in the last ten years, mainly due to more research in different parts of the world. The most authoritative source in this field is the Ethnologue... See http://www.ethnologue.com/subgroups/deaf-sign-language).

Is sign language a real language?

Yes! Sign language is a real language. In 1960, it was the linguist William Stokoe from the US who was the first to demonstrate this fact. Sign languages meet the definition of language. Sign languages arose naturally and, like every other language, consist of types of building blocks, meaningless elements, with which the signs are built. Signs are conventional; this means that over time agreements have grown about the meaning of certain signs. The link between the signs and their meaning is arbitrary. This means that the meaning of a sign and the sign itself are random. Sign language can therefore be considered a system of naturally arisen rules with which people can communicate. (Source: De Nederlandse Gebarentaal, Schermer et al. ISBN9073460190)

Are signs invented?

No, signs are not really invented: they arise naturally. Some signs are made based on the shape of something; we call these iconic signs. For example, a house in the Netherlands has a pointed roof; with your hands, you make the shape of the 'standard' house, this means 'house' in the Netherlands. In Greece, houses do not have pointed roofs, but all houses are flat and only the church has a pointed roof. So who knows, maybe the Dutch sign for house means church in Greece?!! Sometimes it helps you learn the signs if you know why the sign is that way.

Other signs in Dutch Sign Language have absolutely nothing to do with the shape of what you mean; you call these arbitrary signs. Because do you know what 'vacation' looks like? We will try to explain it: You make a movement from your chin with a 'B-hand'. You notice already, hard to explain and understand this way! Why the sign is made that way, nobody knows. It just is. In spoken Dutch you also don't ask why a 'table' is called table, it just is!

Sign language is not international

As you have read above, sign language is not the same in every country! But, when deaf people from different countries meet, they can communicate with each other more easily. The different sign languages do have one very important similarity: they are all visual! You create the language in the same way: the signs are different, but you have the same possibilities. E.g., pointing and acting out and then slowly making clear to each other which signs belong to it. The basis is the same: visual and manual (with your hands). So you don't talk about international sign language, but about international signs. These signs are mutually agreed upon, adopted from each other, and used.

www.gebaren.nl

Hand Alphabet (Fingerspelling)

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

A hand alphabet or finger alphabet is a collection of gestures with which all letters of an alphabet are depicted. Spelling words using the gestures from the hand alphabet is called fingerspelling (or dactylology).

A hand alphabet is part of a sign language. It can be one-handed (in American, Flemish, or Dutch Sign Language) or two-handed (in British Sign Language). Fingerspelling is used in sign language for words and names for which no sign exists yet, or if one of the conversation partners does not know the sign yet. It can also be used to emphasize or clarify abbreviations, terms, or proper names.

Communication with deafblind people also goes via a hand alphabet, the Lorm alphabet. The words are then spelled letter by letter into the palm of the deafblind person so that they can feel what the other is saying. In tactile sign language (or 'four-hand sign language'), names and words for which there is no four-hand sign are (first) spelled in the hand.

British fingerspelling is characterized by the fact that most letters are spelled into the hand; for example, all five vowels are pointed to with the index finger on each finger of the other hand (the thumb stands for A and the pinky for U). This fingerspelling is used not only in Great Britain but also in its (former) colonies such as Australia. Presumably, this fingerspelling originates from deafblind education.

There are small, yet sometimes striking, differences between Dutch and American fingerspelling; for instance, the fingerspelling for the letter T in the US is an obscene gesture in the Netherlands. NOTE: Make sure you use the Dutch Hand Alphabet!

History of the Hand Alphabet

Spanish monk invents a hand alphabet 500 years ago

Source www.doof.nl 15-08-2025 algemeen , samenleving & maatschappij

Did you know that the hand alphabet originated as early as the sixteenth century? The Spanish monk Pedro Ponce de León was worried about the view that deaf and hard of hearing people could not read, write, or speak. That is why he developed a hand alphabet.

For thousands of years, people thought that you could only learn a language by listening to it. The Ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle was even convinced that deaf people could not think because they had no language. He thought that deaf people were stupid. Hence the old-fashioned expression 'deaf-mute' (Dutch: doofstom).

Pedro Ponce León

Fortunately, people think very differently about that now. And Ponce de León played a major role in that. He developed a hand alphabet to communicate with deaf and hard of hearing monks inside and outside the monastery. There already existed a communication system in the monastery that could be used during the daily moments of silence. Ponce de León devised a sign system based on that, which later became the basis for other sign systems. He founded a school in the monastery for deaf children and focused mainly on learning to speak a language. In addition, he taught the children writing and simple signs.

Fingerspelling

Another Spanish clergyman from that time, priest and linguist Juan Pablo Bonet, picked this up further in 1620 and wrote a book about the hand alphabet and fingerspelling. The book was titled: Reducción de las letras y arte para enseñar a hablar a los mudos (translated: Simplification of the letters and the art of teaching the mute to speak). The book contained the first known printed hand alphabet in Europe. And he taught deaf people to link each letter to a phonetic sound with the support of the hand alphabet.

First School for the Deaf

The oldest school for the deaf in the world is located in Paris, France. This school was founded in 1760 by Charles-Michel de l'Épée. The school was intended to offer education to the deaf. In the Netherlands, the first school for the deaf was founded in 1790 in Groningen by Henri Daniel Guyot. The establishment of this school, the Institute for the Deaf, was an important moment in Dutch deaf history and offered education to deaf children.
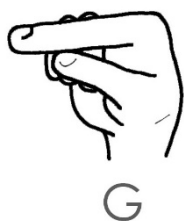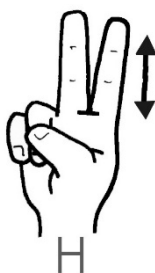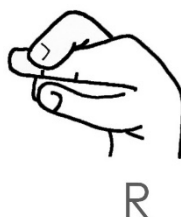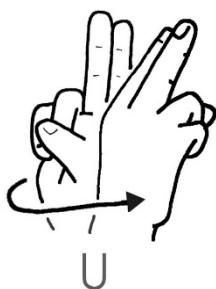
A B C D E

F G H I J

K L M N O

P Q R S T

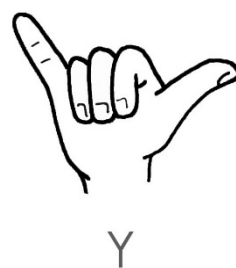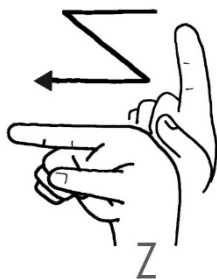U V W X Y

Z

Hand Alphabet User Manual

How do you use the hand alphabet?!

With the letters of the hand alphabet, you can still tell each other words or names for which you do not know the sign in sign language. This is called fingerspelling; with your hand, you spell the letters of the word you want to tell. The person you are telling this to looks closely at your hand and at your mouth. With your hand, you make a separate letter and meanwhile, you pronounce the letter with your mouth but you do not use your voice. So you hear nothing.

You do fingerspelling with the hand you write with.

Note:

- Keep your hand at shoulder height with the back of the hand facing you.
- Form the letters one by one fluently after each other.
- For a double letter, move the hand 'outwards, next to your body'.

Have lots of fun and good luck!

Watch the practice video of the ABC and sign along with the presenter.

Hand Alphabet Video:

https://youtu.be/C3n_B5UGBKs

Signs

Conversation 1.   https://youtu.be/uNKibNzBfs8

Conversation 1

1. Goedemorgen
2. Goedemiddag
3. Goedenavond
4. Tot ziens
5. Naam
6. Naamgebaar
7. Hoe gaat het?
8. Goed
9. Gaat wel
10. Slecht
11. Weet ik niet
12. Weet ik wel
13. Nee
14. Ja
15. Mag niet
16. Mag wel
17. Ziek
18. Beter

English translation:

1. Good morning
2. Good afternoon
3. Good evening
4. See you later
5. Name
6. Name sign
7. How are you?
8. Good
9. Okay
10. Bad
11. I don't know
12. I do know
13. No
14. Yes
15. Not allowed
16. Allowed
17. Sick
18. Better

Verbs 1. https://youtu.be/YOxh_O8eBqg

Verbs 1

19. Aankleden
20. Antwoorden
21. Begrijpen
22. Doen
23. Drinken
24. Eten

25. Fietsen
26. Gaan
27. Helpen
28. Kijken
29. Koken
30. Komen

English translation:

19. To get dressed
20. To answer
21. To understand
22. To do
23. To drink
24. To eat
25. To cycle
26. To go
27. To help
28. To look
29. To cook
30. To come

Question Words 1.   https://youtu.be/EclaFcYvX2I

Question Words

31. Wie
32. Wat
33. Waarom
34. Waar
35. Wanneer
36. Welke
37. Hoeveel

English translation:

31. Who
32. What
33. Why
34. Where
35. When
36. Which
37. How many