How To Learn Sign Language And How Long Does It Take?

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Blue background. In the center, Hugo and Maya sign in ASL. On the left top corner, the American fland and the ASL symbol.

If you are interested in learning Sign Language, you are at the right place! We are not going to lie, learning a different language is always a challenge, but is a very nice initiative, because it opens the doors for another culture and community.

We are here to encourage you to practice American Sign Language (ASL) and start communicating with deaf and hard-of-hearing people. So, pay attention to these tips to get you started!

1. Take Sign Language Classes

Taking Sign Language Classes is a good option to start this journey. It is always easy to have someone holding your hand and walking you through the first steps. Classes are also a good way to meet new people with the same purpose as you, which is an opportunity to practice more often.

Community colleges usually offer those lessons. You can also search it online or even look for your local education authority.

2. Use ASL apps

You can learn ASL with the convenience of an app. Yes! There are already apps that can teach you in a very didactic way. Our favorite one is of course the Hand Talk App, which works as a pocket dictionary and translates all words and sentences from English into American Sign Language, and from Portuguese into Libras (Brazilian Sign Language).

Every time you do not remember a sign, you can look it up. In addition, if you want to have a conversation with someone in ASL, you can use it to help you out. It is a great way to study and practice new signs.

The Hand Talk App is pure technology! Just like Google Translator, it uses artificial intelligence to identify the words and translate them. With the help of the friendly virtual translators Hugo and Maya, the app is already contributing to a more inclusive world and it has been awarded by the UN (United Nations) as the best social app in the world!

You can download it for free in your app store and learn from wherever you are!

3. Take online lessons

Online lessons are very practical. Usually they have very flexible hours, so you can easily organize your schedule. In addition, as they do not need to pay renting expenses, they could be more affordable than when in the classroom. It also has the benefit that you can take them from wherever you are going on a trip, it is not an excuse to miss out.

It is not hard to find ASL online courses. Universities, such as Gallaudet, offer very good ones for free. You can also look for other deaf organizations that may have some more options available, it is worth the search!

4. Learn watching videos

The online content is growing day by day. We are living in the era of knowledge, never before it was so easy to learn something new. Almost everything you want to know is one click away, and Sign Language is not different.

Nowadays, there are plenty of content producers teaching Sign Language in social media. The best part is that you can watch it in the comfort of your home and for free.

Here are some YouTube Channels that can help you out:

Bill Vicars;
Learn How to Sign;
TakeLessons
Chris Georges;
Chrissy Marshalll, among others.
5. Join a Sign Language group
Learning a new language is learning a new culture, and the best way to do that is to get involved with people from this community. Who better for you to practice American Sign Language with than some native signer? Or with someone who is also trying to learn and improve it? That's why joining a Sign Language Group is a smart option.

If you do not know any of them and also don't know where to look for it, a good tip is to visit a meetup website and search for the kind of community you want to join.

6. Get a Sign Language tutor
If you want to improve your Sign Language skills faster, hiring a tutor is probably the fastest way to do it. Search for a good professional near you, or even online, and start practicing as soon as possible.

7. Watch the interpreters
If you are interested in learning Sign Language, the more you watch other people communicating with it, the more you will learn. So, watching Sign Language Interpreters and trying to follow their moves and associate it with the words you are hearing, is a nice way to practice it.

8. Ask deaf people from your circle to teach you
If you already know people from the deaf community that communicate in ASL, don't waste more time! Ask them to teach you and practice with you. Besides improving your Sign Language skills, they will also be happy to see that you are really interested in learning their language to communicate with them and with other people from the community. It is a great way of showing your commitment.

9. Read books
Although ASL is a visual language, there are books that teach some signs and hand configurations. There are also Sign Languages dictionaries, books for children to learn it in a ludic way and much more!

Learning Sign Language by reading books is not the easiest way, as the hand configurations are static on the page and the movements are not really obvious, but it is a good alternative if you are not a fan of online learning!

10. Follow ASL influencers on social media
It is impossible to deny that we are completely involved with social media nowadays. We use it to be aware of what is happening around us and to communicate with loved ones. If you are like most people, you are connected to it a great part of your day.

So, if you are spending a lot of time online, why not fill your digital environment with useful stuff? Follow contents that are going to teach you something new! There are plenty of digital influencers and content producers that are teaching ASL and its culture. Here are some good ones:

@melmira;
@learningsignlanguage;
@ablelingo_asl;
@gallaudetu
11. Pay attention to facial expressions
The facial expressions are a key when it comes to Sign Language! Signers use it to express the feelings and the mood of the sentence and conversation. Most Sign Language learners are ashamed of doing

facial expressions, but a good tip is to let go of the shame and practice the expressions from the beginning!

12. Practice fingerspelling
Fingerspelling is the easiest part of Sign Language. It is really simple to memorize the letters of the alphabet and everytime you forget a sign, you can spell the word and even ask how to sign it.

Frequently asked questions
What are the types of Sign Language?
Many people still think that American Sign Language is universal, but this is not true! Most countries have their own Sign Language. This is due to the fact that each country has its own culture and speaks different languages, which also influences their deaf community and its language.

In fact, there are between 138 and 300 different Sign Languages around the globe!

For exemple:

French Sign Language (FSL): it is one of the oldest Sign Languages and its grammar influenced other Sign Languages such as ASL, ISL (Irish Sign Language), Libras (Brazilian Sign Language), RSL (Russian Sign Language), and more!
Brazilian Sign Language (Libras): it has been recognized by the government since 2002 and is used by more than 3 million brazilians.
British Sign Language (BSL): even though England and America speak the same language (English), the cultural factors have a bigger impact on the Sign Language of the countries and they are far from being the same. But, the BSL has spread to other countries, such as Australia and New Zealand, for example. And many others!

What is the first step to learning Sign Language?
The first step for learning a new language is to make sure you are committed to it. Learning something new requires dedication and patience. Looking for tutorials of basic signs is a good way to start. Also, you can rely on the free Hand Talk App to learn words and sentences, just like a pocket dictionary!

Is Sign Language hard to learn?
The answer to this question is no! If you follow these tips you will learn ASL quicker than you think! If you want to make it easier for yourself, go after lessons and rely on other people’s help to practice and improve your skills! Try to practice a little everyday, surround yourself with content about it, watch interpreters and deaf people signing. And count on Hugo’s Blog to keep learning more tips, tricks and content about the deaf community.

How Long Does It Usually Take To Learn Sign Language?
This is relative. It depends mostly on you. There is no recipe and magical tricks to learn a new language from the beginning. It depends on how much time you have available for studying it per day or week, it also depends on your ability to absorb new information and many other matters. It could take 10 months, or 5 years. The quicker you want this process to be, the more committed you must be with your practices.

How to Learn Sign Language for free?
Throughout this content, we gave many tips on how to learn Sign Language in a free and easy way. You can start by watching videos on YouTube, follow ASL influencer and content producers on social media, download online books about Sign Language and hand configuration, look for groups of signers and practice with other people, download the Hand Talk App and use it to learn new sentences, look for free online courses, such as the Gallaudet one to help you on this journey, and make friends with deaf people and ask them to help you out (they will be happy to see that you are interested on their language and culture).

What are the best apps to learn Sign Language?
The best app to learn Sign Language is the Hand Talk App because it works just like Google Translator and you can learn most of the words from the dictionary! So open your app store and download it now for free!

There are also other apps that are pretty good, such as:

Preply;
Italki;
Pocket Sign;
Sign School;
Marlee Signs.
Conclusion
If you want to learn Sign Language, you must be committed to studying and practicing to learn it quickly. There are plenty of ways to do it for free!

The deaf community is very friendly and they love when hearing people are interested in learning their language to better communicate with them and also be inclusive! So make friends and try to learn from them!

We hope you have enjoyed this content and we will see you on the next ones!

15 tips for learning American Sign Language
Did you already ask yourself, what's the best way to learn ASL? Here are some great tips for improving your ASL skills faster! Learning a sign language will become more fun if you try some of the following tips.

1. Learn the 100 most important vocabulary
To start communicating, you need to know some basic vocabulary. That's why at the beginning of your ASL journey you should aim to learn the essentials, like "hello", "thanks" or "please".

As soon as you know some words you can start getting into a conversation:

Hello
Thanks
Please
2. Learn the finger alphabet
It is vital to learn the ASL alphabet when you start out with American Sign Language. Knowing the alphabet will give you the skill to sign any word. So, if you forget a sign you can simply spell it.

To become better at fingerspelling, try to spell objects you see around yourself like C-O-M-P-U-T-E-R or T-R-E-E. Lingvano premium users have access to our finger alphabet trainer, which helps to improve fingerspelling skills.

ASL alphabet
Spelling: N-e-w Y-o-r-k C-i-t-y
3. Learn to sign the phrase "How do I sign … ?"
As soon as you know the finger alphabet and the phrase "How do I sign … (spelled word)?", you can ask for any sign. So, let's learn this phrase.

How do I sign L-I-N-G-V-A-N-O?
4. Conversation!
Don't wait before getting into conversations and start to sign right away! As soon as you know some basic words and the alphabet don't hesitate to approach other ASL users. Making conversation is key to learning any language. Many language learners make the mistake and wait too long before

communicating with other people.

5. Find a practice buddy or join the local Deaf community
To make conversation you need people to interact with. Most cities or towns have a local Deaf community. Visit meetups and surround yourself with people who know how to sign.

If you live far away from a big city, try to find a practice buddy via the internet (e.g. in Facebook groups). You can communicate with your buddy through video calls!

6. Don’t worry about understanding everything
Lots of language learners are afraid that they will not understand everything when communicating with other people.

It’s not important to understand every sign of a sentence. Just try to get the overall meaning of the sentences. Your skills will constantly improve and it will become easier to understand the content.

In most cases, the people you are signing with are empathic and open to help any time you are struggling to understand the meaning of the sentence.

7. Learn phrases you frequently use
Learn some key phrases which are important to you. This will make you more fluent, especially when making small talk!

8. Be aware of an unsteady learning curve
Keep in mind that everyone has bad days. On some days you might feel like you’ve forgotten all signs and you’re not making any progress. Do not let such emotions take away your motivation. The learning progress is not linear like most people believe. It’s often bumpy, but in the long run, your skills are rising.

9. Build great habits
Keep in mind that consistency is more important than intensity. Learn ASL every day! You don’t have to learn for an hour each day. 5-10 minutes are enough to improve your skills. Just try to keep it rolling!

10. Make mistakes! Be childlike. Don’t worry about perfection
One reason why children generally learn faster than adults is that they are not afraid to make mistakes. Making mistakes is one of the most important parts of the learning process. Still, most of us adults are self-conscious and feel like they should not make mistakes. Don’t be afraid to make mistakes. Act more childlike and learn faster. Nobody will judge you.

11. Use the Pareto principle
Did you hear about the Pareto principle also known as 80/20 rule?

The Pareto principle says, that roughly 80% of the effects come from 20% of the causes. Transferred to language learning this means that 20% of things you learn contribute to 80% of your total ASL improvement. In other words, only a small proportion of your learning input is driving a large part of your learning progress.

In language learning, the important part which is driving the learning progress is simply engaging with the language! Listening, reading, and speaking! Don’t get lost spending too much time on learning grammar or rarely used vocabulary.

12. Find your favorite YouTuber
Immerse yourself in ASL. Go on social media and find your favorite channels. Being surrounded by ASL will boost your progress and make learning ASL more fun!

Popular Deaf YouTube channels are:

Signed with Heart – https://www.youtube.com/c/signedwithheart/
Deafies in Drag – https://www.youtube.com/c/DeafiesinDrag/
Deafinitely Dope – https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCC5MIgD3lTZkKzTahvoJ9Kw
What the Deaf?! – https://www.youtube.com/channel/UChlvmpkvgsc2fR9rAVTYQew
Sign Duo – https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCET0ZgnCFLi1369c3ZWfSFA
13. Track your progress
Tracking your progress will motivate you to keep learning ASL. Making weekly videos of yourself while signing is a great way to track your progress. You could keep the videos for yourself to view them some months later or share them on social media. They are a great memory of your ASL journey.

14. Set goals
You might get more motivation by setting daily, weekly, or monthly goals. Here are some examples:

Learn 5 signs every day
Have one conversation in sign language each week
Learn 20 phrases each month
Review the finger alphabet using the Lingvano finger alphabet trainer every day
Vision
15. Keep it fun and remember your “why”
This is the most important advice. Keep learning ASL fun! If you do not enjoy learning ASL you will most probably lose motivation and stop learning.

Also, remember why you are learning sign language. Knowing your goal will keep you learning.

How to learn sign language
Published by Ellie Parfitt at June 1, 2020
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How to learn sign language using 10 easy tips
In the hearing loss community, sign language is one of the major forms of communication used.
It consists of hand movements, hand shapes as well as facial expressions and lip patterns in order to demonstrate what people want to say.

Sign language is often used instead of spoken language in Deaf communities, as some people with hearing loss have been brought up solely using sign language to communicate with family or friends. Of course, even those with normal or limited hearing can also learn this wonderful, expressive language!

Here are my tips to learn sign language:

Types of sign language
The first thing to understand is what type of sign language you want to learn. This will most likely be based on where you live, and what verbal language is spoken in your community. Hand signs can vary based on the type of sign language being used. For example, there is American Sign Language (ASL), British Sign Language (BSL) and various others, based on different languages.

In general, sign language is grouped into three sections :

Deaf sign languages: The preferred languages of Deaf communities around the world; including village sign languages, shared with the hearing community, and Deaf-community sign languages

Auxiliary sign languages: Sign systems used alongside oral, spoken languages.
Signed modes of spoken languages, or manually coded languages: Used to bridge signed and spoken languages

How to learn sign language

how to learn sign language

Take a sign language class

If you're ever considering learning sign language, this is one of the best ways to do it! Often community centers, community colleges or other educational centers offer day or evening classes. Qualified sign language tutors can help you work toward sign language qualifications. Classes are also a great way to meet new people and see the signs face-to-face.

There are also online classes. Some of my HearingLikeMe writers have taken classes with ASL For You and have learned a lot through weekly Zoom classes.

Being in a class gives the opportunity to practice signing with different people. It is considered a good investment if the qualification leads to a job!

If you're interested, research for classes in your local area or contact your local education authority.

Learn online by watching videos

Like many things these days, you can learn easily online! There are plenty of resources, like YouTube or BSL Zone where you can watch videos with sign language. Any form of video is a great way to watch and you can replay it as many times as you like, in the comfort of your own home.

Read more: Easily learn sign language by studying these GIFs

Join a sign language group, deaf club or visit a deaf café

Many cities have deaf clubs or groups of deaf people who meet regularly and quite often use sign language as their form of communication. It's a fantastic place to meet new people, who share hearing loss in common as well as the chance to polish your sign language skills. You can contact a Deaf charity or organization nearby, or search for a group using websites such as Meetup.com to find a group for you.

Take an online course

Online courses can be an alternative to day or evening classes that you take in-person. Some Deaf organizations and universities provide these, so do some research to find the best course for you. For example, Gallaudet University has a free online course to learn ASL.

Online courses are more flexible because they can be done in your own time, or in the comfort of your own home. You can practice as much as you need, and there is often no pressure to complete it.

Hire a private, qualified sign language tutor

If you want to learn sign language quickly, a private tutor could be the best way. Research local, qualified sign language tutors in your area who are willing to offer private tuition. Courses could be done in one-to-one sessions, or in small groups of your choice. You may find a private tutor more of a benefit if you find a large class environment is too difficult to learn in.

Watch and mimic interpreters

You can easily pick up signs by watching others, particularly sign language interpreters. You can often find them at deaf events or on TV during special, live events. Some TV shows also utilize sign language, such as "Switched at Birth."

Ask your Deaf friends and family teach you

Asking a Deaf friend to teach you some sign language is a great way of making new Deaf friends! If you know friends or family use sign language already, asking them to teach you some signs will also remove some stresses from the struggle of oral/spoken conversation with them – making the exchange beneficial

for both of you.

Just make sure your friend or family member uses sign language before asking them, as not all people who have hearing loss know sign language.

Read more: Why I'm learning sign language as an "orally" profound deafie

Use an App
There are also a few apps available to learn sign language on!

My favorite is the 'Sign BSL' app, which is a British Sign Language Dictionary app. If you don't know how to sign a word, you can search for it on the app so it's a great resource.

There are also great apps for ASL learners. The language learning platform, Drops, released ASL on their Scripts app in conjunction with the United Nations' International Day of Sign Languages The app teaches learners how to read and write alphabets and character-based language systems.

Drops' ASL offering on Scripts is free for 5 minutes a day, allowing anyone with the Scripts app the ability to quickly learn the ASL alphabet. By associating illustrations of the signs to their meanings and testing users through fun, 5-minute games, Drops is bringing their acclaimed learning approach to an even broader audience and leveraging its global, multi-million user base to bring global awareness and access to ASL.

Read a Book
If you're not a fan of online learning, there are plenty of books available at bookshops and libraries. There are varieties from Sign Language dictionaries, books for children, step by step learning and so much more!

These, however, may be more difficult to learn from, as the movements for the signs are not as obvious to see, in contrast to watching a video.

Watch a video/DVD
Yet another suggestion is watching a video or DVD or pre-recorded sign language learning video. Some organizations have created videos or DVDs especially to help you learn the language properly. If you're not sure which one to get, why not contact a Deaf organization or visit your local library.

A few more tips to learn sign language
Once you've found your preferred language learning method, you need to be aware of a few things to successfully use sign language.

Facial expressions are key: Deaf people use facial expressions to determine the mood of the conversation or topic. It also brings more character to the sign language. Don't be afraid to be expressive, as the teacher or video learner will show you.
Utilize real-life situations: Real-life exchanges with other people who know sign language will help you learn more quickly! Join social groups to help you practice.
You'll need qualifications to be professional: If you want to be an interpreter, you'll need further qualifications. Talk to your professors or community deaf groups for more information.
Practice your fingerspelling! Fingerspelling is quite simple, and an easy way to communicate with deaf people without memorizing all the word phrases. Even a little bit of sign language will be beneficial when communicating with deaf people!
Now that you've got a basis on how to learn sign language, I hope you can find local or online resources to do so! Remember to have fun while learning, and communicate with other sign language users. You will be well on your way to make new friends, communicate with others and grow your own language comprehension!

Some of us choose to only sign when we're in an environment that prompts us to. For example, some may only sign whilst in the company of their d/Deaf community, or at a signing class. As we know, practice makes perfect, and the more practice that you can do in front of others, the better! Immersing yourself into all things d/Deaf culture is another great way to help you to inadvertently improve your skills.

Learn ASL: A Guide to Getting You Started Fast
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Green background. In the center, the illustration of a hand holding a clock.
Did you know that American Sign Language (ASL) is among the most popular languages for second-language learners? It's constantly growing in popularity and is an exciting choice for budding bilinguals.

However, when it comes to putting in the work, learning ASL is no different from learning other languages – be it Portuguese, Arabic, or Japanese.

That being said, the time it will take you to learn ASL can vary.

Traditionally, it's believed that native English speakers need about 600 classroom hours to achieve near-fluency in a language like Spanish or French. And it can take even up to 2,200 hours to learn a more dissimilar language such as Chinese or Arabic. That's quite a wide range, and ASL will likely fall somewhere in the middle.

At the same time, it's important to remember that while ASL is a full-fledged language like any other, it works quite a bit differently than oral languages.

Why is that?

You'll spend far more time on facial expressions and gestures than you will on speaking. ASL grammar has its own unique rules for phonology, morphology, syntax, and pragmatics – and mastering it may take some time.

If you're looking to learn ASL and want to make a fast first move, here are our top tips to make the most of your time without sacrificing the needed practice!

1. Watch Videos on ASL
There's an increasing emphasis on listening as the all-important factor of language learning, to the point where it's been called the 'Cinderella skill' for being previously overlooked. In the context of sign language, any sign language speaker must know how important visual learning is to become truly fluent.

As you start your learning journey, know that there are tons of both paid and free resources available, together with many tools that can make learning fun! Nowadays, you can basically learn sign language in any method you prefer. Specifically, the proliferation of streaming content online has been a massive boon for ASL learners. Here are a couple of options to check out:

Step-by-step classes: While offline classes are always a great option to consider, online video tools are worth a shot, too. You can both schedule online lessons (via Zoom, Skype, Google Hangouts, and other tools) or turn to step-by-step courses – like ASL for Free from the Gallaudet University – that will walk you through the basics until you get to more advanced content.
Conversations with fluent ASL speakers: Making sure to practice as you progress is key. While in-class sessions can prepare you well, casual conversations with a fellow ASL speaker can take you to another level of fluency. They can also help you identify your strengths and weaknesses – something you can work on with a teacher.
To supercharge your learning, hiring a tutor really works wonders in terms of achieving fast and

sustainable progress. Online tutors tend to be more affordable than those in-person, but ultimately you should decide based on your personal preference.

Not only do they make sure you learn phrases, know how to form sentences, and can maintain a conversation, but they can also walk you through the perfect your HOLME. Handshape, Orientation, Location, Movement, and Expression are the key aspects of each sign you will make.

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2. Focus On The Basics (At First)
Sign language is difficult, and that's okay. Languages are supposed to be hard.

Why?

Because we need to be able to express an infinite amount of concepts using a vast vocabulary.

However, don't get discouraged. A good way to approach learning is to focus on the basics at first. While you may want to express your full-fledged opinions on your favorite hobbies and interests, you have to walk before you can run.

Make sure you really know how to say "yes", "no", "please", "thank you", and that you can ask all the basic questions like "where is" and "how do I" before you jump into more complex sentence structures and vocabulary. Also, if you're unsure of your skills, don't be afraid to slow down and spend some more time practicing before you move on.

It's only when students ignore the basics that they get ahead of themselves and often lose focus. We can't stress this enough – don't get discouraged! Any progress is a great sign of better learning.

3. Visit a Deaf Event
There's an incredible variety of ASL speakers out there. Some are born deaf and learned ASL at a young age, some picked it up as a second language, or they grew up hearing around deaf family members.

The great thing is that ASL opens your doors to the Deaf community – one that's incredibly diverse and inspiring, made up of people from all backgrounds and nationalities. The community tends to be closely connected and its members meet regularly – with many of the spaces open to everyone, including fellow ASL speakers.

Know that you don't have to have a fluent grasp of the language to attend events organized by the Deaf community. If you run into any trouble communicating, there will most likely be several bilingual members around to help you out (it never hurts to check in advance if you're unsure though!).

Exploring your local Deaf scene can go a long way. For example, search for gatherings on sites like MeetUp.com, and see if there's one in your area anytime soon. Remember to always be respectful and courteous, but also be open to making new friends and trying your best to sign. The fact that you're making a serious effort will earn you respect among your signing peers!

4. Use an ASL App
While you shouldn't solely rely on a language app to learn ASL (or any other language, really), your smartphone can be an excellent means of solidifying your knowledge base. A good sign language dictionary is almost essential, allowing you a quick and easy way to look up what you don't know or make a fast translation.

Some apps to try out include:

Hands On ASL, a great app to get started with fingerspelling.
Sign ASL, a comprehensive ASL dictionary with over 30,000 videos.
Hand Talk, your go-to pocket translator with a loveable avatar Hugo.
5. Practice Fingerspelling
One of the hardest parts of learning sign language is memorizing the signs. In a pinch, it can be useful to use fingerspelling instead. While easy and straightforward (fingerspelling is exactly what it sounds like), it does require some practice to get good at. You'll want to be able to fingerspell quickly and without much thought whenever you've forgotten a sign or phrase in sign language.

Facial expressions are also extremely important in ASL. Even if you don't know the particular sign or phrase, a big smile can obviously help convey your positive meaning when you're fingerspelling a word – or a frown if it's something negative.

When learning any language, there will be times where you'll get discouraged. Often, it's not so much of an upward trajectory as it is highs and lows; some days you'll have a great conversation with a deaf person, while other times you'll struggle to express yourself and not know why. This is normal, and it's nothing to get frustrated by. Just wanting to learn the language means you're already off to a great start for achieving your ASL dreams!

If you want to explore more related topics, make sure to browse our blog!

A question that we are often asked is, 'how do I practice my fingerspelling in British Sign Language (BSL)' – so read on to our 8 ways to practice.

First, let's talk a little bit about fingerspelling, what are its use and its function within BSL.

Fingerspelling is a grammatical function within BSL used to spell out the names of people and places. It can also be used when the signer does not know the sign for that particular word. Many signs within BSL use a letter of the fingerspelling alphabet to start off the word, such as 'gold' and 'silver'.

FACT: Some of the older generation of Deaf people use more fingerspelling than signs!

Just to clarify, in BSL, there is a sign for almost every word, which is more efficient than fingerspelling every word.

Right….on to terptree's top tips!

1. Meet with other BSL students and test one another

2. Teach your family how to fingerspell and get them to test you!

3. Go around your home or workplace and fingerspell the names of objects that you see

4. Go to a Deaf club or Deaf event to practice your BSL; this offers the opportunity also to practice your fingerspelling!

5. Youtube is a wonderful resource for free access to practice materials. Type in BSL Fingerspelling, and you will be amazed at what you find

6. Register for the BSL Homework site with Signature, where you have free access to the 101 modules of Level 1

7. Contact terptree, and we can book you onto one of our BSL Refresher courses for Level 1 or Level 2 or even a 1:1 session with one of our fantastic tutors, and you can get your fingerspelling skills improved in just a few hours!

8. A tip added by Interpreter Helen Hampton, RSLI "I always found the best way to practice was finger spelling a whole story from the newspaper on the train on the way to and from work and also lying in the bath and finger spelling everything on the back of the shampoo bottles (especially all the ingredients)" Thanks Helen

We hope that this blog post has been helpful, and any questions you have, contact us at training@terptree.co.uk

Finger spelling is used in ASL to spell out English words. Each country has its own, unique Manual Alphabet. The American Manual Alphabet is one-handed, as opposed to the British two-handed Manual Alphabet.

Which hand should you use? If your dominant hand is your right hand, use your right hand. If you are left handed, use your left hand. Do what is comfortable for you. These hand shapes, along with the Number hand shapes are used to make most of the signs you are learning. For example: The "A-hand" is used for the signs "aunt," "girl," and many more. The "5-hand" is used for the signs "mother" and "father." The "3-hand" is used for showing the movement of vehicles, such as cars.

HINTS FOR READING FINGERSPELLING (RECEPTIVE):
1. SOUND IT OUT: When reading finger spelling, don't think, say, or read individual letters; sound them out, as syllables.
2. CONFIGURATION: Try to see the shape of the whole word, not the individual letters. For example: see Job as a shape not as J-O-B.
3. CONTEXT: Use the context of the conversation to help you decipher finger spelled words. For example: "Yesterday I went to the store, "W******T". You know from the context of the finger spelled word that it is the name of a store starting with W and ending in T, with approximately 6-7 letters. Wal-Mart! It is very helpful to use context when reading finger spelling.
4. DON'T PANIC: when you don't catch a fingerspelled word the first time. Just ask the person to spell it again and again until you get it. Deaf people want clear communication and to be understood. Don't try to pretend you understand when you don't, as it is obvious to them and leads to miscommunication.

One more helpful hint: Remember the 3 "C"s.
The first "C" is Communicate – don't settle for unclear communication. Do what it takes to communicate clearly. The second "C" is Comprehension. Work for comprehension.
The third "C" is stay Calm and relaxed.
If you remember all of these tips and practice, practice, practice, you will be successful in your attempts to communicate clearly.

WHEN TO PRACTICE:
While driving: When stopped at red lights, practice the colors: red, green, yellow. Or things you see around you: man, woman. Just be careful to keep your eyes and mind on your driving! Street signs and street names are good practice. While at home and sitting watching TV, spell words that you hear throughout the program. While reading the newspaper, pick out words to practice. Want to know the best way to practice? Interact with Deaf people! The more you see finger spelling, the faster your skills will

improve. Don’t be afraid to ask someone to repeat. Stay calm MANUAL ALPHABET: While practicing the Manual Alphabet remember to spell in the space in front of your body, not in front of your mouth. Remember speed is not the goal; accuracy and clarity are the goals.

HINTS FOR EXPRESSIVE FINGERSPELLING:
1. Hand Placement: Hold your arm comfortably at your side and spell in an imaginary square from shoulders to waist. Avoid spelling in front of your mouth.
2. Speed: Don’t work for speed. Work for clarity and accuracy. Spell neither too fast nor too slow.
3. Palm Orientation: Spell with your palm facing outward, not toward your face. Practicing in front of a mirror will help you remember to turn your hand out.
4. Practice as much as possible with Deaf native signers who will help you spell correctly.
5. Do not be afraid to ask for help.
CULTURAL INFORMATION:
EYE CONTACT, & ATTENTION GETTING
EYE CONTACT: One of the most annoying and difficult hindrances to visual communication is the habit that hearing people have developed when conversing verbally: wandering eyes. It is unnecessary for hearing people to maintain continual eye gaze, as they are able to use their ears to continue the conversation uninterrupted, while glancing toward unexpected or curious noises in the environment. Our eyes can attend to children needing correction or attention, objects falling on the floor, and pouring our drinks, while the conversation continues, uninterrupted. For a non-hearing person, these distractions are not only annoying and distracting, but more importantly, are considered as a blatant disregard for them as a person of worth. Interrupted eye-gaze sends a message loud and clear: “this distraction is more important than you are.” It is a social blunder not easily forgiven. Even though the SIGNER does not maintain strict eye contact, as we learned in the Language portion of this lesson, the LISTENER must. Remember, all else waits while you are “listening.”

GETTING ATTENTION: There are several acceptable and unacceptable ways of getting the attention of a nonhearing person in order to communicate. Unacceptable ways: waving your hand close to their face, yelling, talking in a loud voice, or throwing something at them. Acceptable ways: simply place a hand gently on their shoulder, or arm, but not on the head. If you are not close enough to reach them, walk over to them or ask someone near them to tap them. When wanting the whole room’s attention, flicking the lights or stomping on a wooden floor is appropriate.

7 Tips to Boost Your BSL Fingerspelling
By Access BSL
Learning BSL? Our tutors outline some hints and tips for using and improving your fingerspelling.

Table of Contents

What is fingerspelling?
Fingerspelling is a method for making letters from the alphabet on your hands to create words. Your

fingers and handshapes represent different letters of the British Sign Language alphabet. BSL uses a two-handed system – it is a small but important element of Sign Language. Fingerspelling is different across the world. For example, some countries such as the U.S or Ireland use a one-handed alphabet.

What is fingerspelling used for?
When you start learning BSL, you tend to learn to fingerspell first. It is easy to learn and you can pick up the basics quickly. You can use it for spelling:

a person's name an object or place
a word for a subject or concept e.g. p-h-y-s-i-c-s
a regional sign e.g. h-o-l-i-d-a-y
a sign that is part of BSL's core lexicon e.g. the letter 'M' tapped twice (M-M) on the hand means 'mum' or 'Monday'.
a word where someone has forgotten the sign or where a sign doesn't exist
British sign language alphabet left hand
British sign language alphabet right hand
Fingerspelling charts usually show static images of the different letters but fingerspelling, like signs, uses moving hands. Static images cannot convey how your hands are used in the real world.

*Fun fact: over 100 years ago, deaf people used fingerspelling more than signs! There are videos from the 1920s that show deaf people fingerspelling (at speed).

The video from BSL Training below shows you how to do the BSL alphabet on the hands:

Which hand do I use?
Students often get confused about which hand to use. It doesn't matter if you are left-handed or right-handed, your dominant hand will make the shapes.

Hot tip Think of your dominant hand as the pen and your non-dominant hand as the paper. Your dominant hand will move towards your non-dominant hand for each finger.

How do I position my hands?
You need to hold your hands at chest height, away from the body. Your palm needs to be towards you when you are fingerspelling words.

Any tips to improve fingerspelling?
Tutors usually focus on making sure your handshapes are correct for each letter. Reading fingerspelling is more difficult than learning the handshapes. Even trainee interpreters have difficulty with reading fingerspelled words at times.

Pattern spotting
Our brain is hardwired to look for patterns when learning something new so here are a few patterns you can practice and look out for when you are watching someone else fingerspell:

Signs with double tapping letters (initialised signs) include mother, father, yellow, Wednesday, April, toilet, kitchen, geography, Tuesday
Signs with letters that have circular movements include colour, group, video, college, Friday
Signs where letters are moving to and from the body include care, propose, visit, million, disability, comfortable, refer. Fingerspelled letters that move away from the body include bronze, habit, gold, double, silver
Common word endings are easy to identify when fingerspelling. For example, 'ing' is easily identifiable. It is usually created using one flowing movement rather than three separate letters. The effect is that in

reading words like ring, king, sing, or wing you see one letter followed by the easily recognisable ‘ing’ pattern rather than four separate letters. This obviously makes ‘reading’ fingerspelling much easier
Abbreviations. Words such as months of the year are shortened to Jan, Feb, Mch, Apr or ‘A’, May, Jun, Aug, Sept, Oct, Nov and Dec. May and July are the only months of the year that are usually fingerspelled completely. Other abbreviations include place names such as Brazil (BZ) and Edinburgh (EDH).
Words with double letters e.g. sleep, school and so on.

Other obvious word ending patterns include: ed, ar, ck, ham, don, com, th and many more.

Context is important – some fingerspelled signs look the same but can mean two different things e.g. Tuesday, toilet.

What makes understanding fingerspelling so difficult?
There are several reasons for failing to understand what is being spelled:

speed,
the word (silent letters, anyone?),
hand position
the accuracy of the spelling.
There are also letter variations that many learners are not aware of. The BSL alphabet is not actually limited to 26 letters. Some letters change depending on the context of the spelled word. Fluency and pace develop over time. To improve your confidence, you need to improve two skills:

Develop a flow and reasonable pace when spelling words
Understanding someone fingerspelling to you
Improving your flow:
Practice for 5 minutes every day. Improve the flow of your fingerspelling by practising spelling random words. You can practice spelling the words for objects around you. Or you could practice spelling pages in a book. You could really challenge yourself and try to do the alphabet….. backwards! Practising will help you know where the letters are on your hands. You also avoid a fingerspelling no.no….looking at your hands (see below).

Hot tip When fingerspelling, break down the syllables in a word. Mouth the syllables as you fingerspell.

Understand someone spelling to you
Context is everything. Information signed before and after the fingerspelling will give you clues. For example, if someone is describing a group of people, you know they might spell someone’s name. Or if someone is signing about a location, the person may refer to a specific street.

Hot tip: when you ‘read’ fingerspelling, read the whole word, not individual letters. Use phonetics and try to see the sound of the word.

I am dyslexic. Any tips?
There are many strategies you can use to help. For example, you can memorise the ‘patterns’ of fingerspelled words. Or memorise the hand shapes for each letter – the shapes are visually similar to the letters.

Test your receptive skills – fingerspelling challenge!
We recommend practising with friends, family, or any deaf friends you may have. If you attend a BSL course, your tutor will give you plenty of practice with games in class. Alternatively, you can use online games such as a fingerspelling generator. We recommend the BSL Signbank website for fingerspelling practice as it uses real handshapes.

Do’s and don’ts:

Do:

Practice spelling words, not just the alphabet
Develop your own ‘rhythm’
Keep hands at chest level
Don’t

Don’t look at your hands when you’re spelling
Don’t be afraid to ask for clarification!
You can always ask a signer to repeat their fingerspelling. But a better strategy is to ask questions such as: Are you talking about (person’s name)? Or, “you spelled P something R, right?”

Hot tip Try to catch the first, and last letter. You can narrow down your options. For example, a girl’s name starting with C ending in e could be Claire, Chloe, Charlie, Charlotte. As you progress through your BSL course, your fluency will improve so you can catch the first, middle and last letter.

Other types of manual alphabet:
In the UK, we also have the deafblind manual alphabet or tactile alphabet. It is based on the BSL alphabet but uses touch to draw the shape of letters on the other person’s hand. You can find out more about this alphabet from Sense.

Be patient
Learning the BSL alphabet is easy and it can be a valuable tool when you forget a sign. Just remember, that understanding what is being spelled to you is a skill that develops over time. You don’t need to get it right the first time so don’t be afraid to ask the person signing to repeat the spelling of a word. Be kind to yourself and be patient.

Need to improve other signing skills?
Why not check out our other signing skills guides. You can also download copies of the fingerspelling alphabet charts here.

The fingerspelling above is what it looks like in general and by standard. It is fluid. Though, fluent signers have adopted some certain styles and movements for some words and certain letters.

A very common habit among hearing ASL students and self-taught signers is that they fingerspell bouncingly. Don’t bounce when fingerspelling. It’s your first crucial step to efficient fingerspelling.

Pause Technique
How does one recognize a space between fingerspelled words. There are several subtle indicators. A person indicates a brief pause or space between fingerspelled words. It is the equivalent of a space in spoken or written forms. In addition, the person also indicate a slight stress of the first or last letter of each word, along with a non-manual marker (eg. slightly nodding).

In this natural, native-level fingerspelling, notice the pause between the first and the last names in these videos above.

Fingerspelling Error
In the event of spelling incorrectly, a signer usually gives self-correction cues to acknowledge the error and starts to spell again.

Those videos show an example of how to self-correct an error in spelling. This goes the same for signing. When one mispronunces in ASL, they self-correct the sign and continues on. A little disclosure: The errors were made on purpose.

Double Letters
Some words have double letters, such as "Anna", "pizza", "apple", etc. There are a few techniques for fingerspelling the double letter in a word.

One of the techniques is the "glide". The video above shows an example of using the glide for the letter "n" in "Anna". The signer glides the double-letter sideway briefly. However, this movement does not work for some alphabetical letters (e.g. it does not fit well for "p" in "apple"), in which one has to fingerspell the double letter "individually" like any other letters.

This is an example of the individual spelling for double letters in apple, using the "bounce" technique.

Another technique, though unique that works only for one alphabetical letter, is the double "z" as in "pizza", in which the handshape has double bent fingers instead of a (single) index finger. The video above illustrates the double letter "z".

Receptive Skill Practice Tips
It takes some time to learn to finger-read. Here are some suggestions for developing receptive skills in fingerspelling:

Watch videos and assimilate ASL signs. Read fingerspelled words as whole words (configurations), not letter by letter. This sign language website has fingerspelling receptive skill practice. See the link below.

Practice with your sign language partner in person or via webcam.

Use fingerspelling font in your emails to your friend. :-)

‘Fingerspelling’ Campaign by American Society for Deaf Children Empowers Parents of Deaf Children
June 26, 2023
Learn how the Fingerspelling.xyz campaign, a browser-based app utilizing machine learning and webcam technology, is helping parents of deaf children to quickly learn American Sign Language (ASL) and bridge the communication gap.

Every year in the United States, approximately 2 to 3 out of every 1,000 children are born deaf or hard-of-hearing. Surprisingly, 90% of these children are born to parents with typical hearing abilities, often making them the first encounter these parents have with a deaf individual. Unfortunately, without early exposure to sign language, deaf children may face language delays or deprivation, which can have significant long-term consequences. Recognizing the importance of addressing this issue, we have partnered with the American Society for Deaf Children to develop Fingerspelling.xyz, an innovative campaign aimed at combatting language deprivation and fostering communication between the deaf and the hearing community.

Introducing Fingerspelling.xyz:
Fingerspelling.xyz is a cutting-edge browser-based application designed to facilitate the learning of American Sign Language (ASL) through webcam technology and machine learning. With this intuitive app, users can improve their fingerspelling skills by receiving real-time feedback on their hand movements, allowing them to make necessary corrections quickly and effectively.

How it works
To start, you are given a series of words and the computer shows you a 3D model of how your hand should be positioned for each letter. When you sign the word, the camera tracks your hand movements and gives you feedback so you can make corrections as needed. This helps you quickly develop your fingerspelling skills and move to the next level of the program.

The fingerspelling game is a great way to introduce the basics of ASL in a fun and playful way. Instead of having to read or watch videos about fingerspelling, we offer an online teaching tool that guides you step by step in how to master fingerspelling – hands on! The game leverages advanced hand recognition technology, matched with machine learning, to give you real time feedback via the webcam for each sign and word you spell correctly. The game is designed for desktop, primarily to be used by parents for deaf children, but kids will also find it a fun way to practice and improve their fingerspelling technique.

Fingerspelling is an essential part of ASL, the primary language of the Deaf community. It is often used for proper nouns or to sign a word you don't know the sign for.

The Impact:
Overcoming Language Deprivation: By empowering parents of deaf children with the opportunity to learn ASL at an early stage, Fingerspelling.xyz plays a vital role in preventing language delays or deprivation. Parents can acquire the necessary skills to communicate with their child, ensuring a nurturing environment for language development.

Bridging Communication Barriers: The campaign's partnership with the American Society for Deaf Children seeks to bridge the gap between the deaf and the hearing community. Fingerspelling.xyz serves as a valuable resource for individuals interested in learning ASL, fostering inclusivity, and enhancing communication between these two groups.

Efficient Learning Experience: Fingerspelling.xyz offers an engaging fingerspelling game that introduces the fundamentals of ASL in a playful and enjoyable manner. Users can embark on a step-by-step journey to master fingerspelling, gaining practical hands-on experience through interactive guidance.

Conclusion:
With the prevalence of deaf and hard-of-hearing children born to hearing parents in the United States, it is crucial to address language deprivation by providing parents with the means to learn ASL. Fingerspelling.xyz, a collaborative effort with the American Society for Deaf Children, utilizes innovative webcam technology and machine learning to empower parents and individuals to acquire ASL skills efficiently. By reducing communication barriers and promoting early language acquisition, Fingerspelling.xyz plays a significant role in improving the lives of deaf children and their families, fostering a more inclusive and connected society.

Credits
Client: American Society for Deaf Children
Agency: HELLOMONDAY/DEPT®

Tags:
Fingerspelling app, Learn ASL online, ASL alphabet learning, Deaf child communication, American Sign Language learning, Language deprivation prevention, ASL fingerspelling game, Communication barrier bridge, Parents of deaf children, Webcam ASL learning, ASL learning for hearing parents, Language development for deaf children, Fingerspelling practice tool, ASL education for beginners, Sign language learning platform

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How to Avoid Common ASL Mistakes and Learn ASL Faster

American Sign Language Classes - Talk2Practice.com
How to Avoid Common ASL Mistakes and Learn ASL Faster
American Sign Language (ASL) is a beautiful and expressive language that uses hand gestures, facial expressions, and body movements to communicate. Learning ASL can be rewarding and fun, but it can also be challenging and frustrating. Many beginners make common ASL mistakes that can affect their communication and comprehension. In this blog post "How to Avoid Common ASL Mistakes and Learn ASL Faster", we will discuss some of these mistakes and how to avoid them. We will also recommend a great way to learn ASL faster and easier with Talk2Practice.com, a website that offers live classes with certified ASL tutors.

Common ASL Mistakes

Some of the common ASL mistakes that beginners may make are:

Using the wrong handshape for certain signs, such as using a closed hand instead of an open hand, or using two fingers instead of one finger. This can change the meaning of the sign and cause confusion.

Using the wrong palm orientation for certain signs, such as facing the palm inward instead of outward, or facing the palm up instead of down. This can also change the meaning of the sign and cause misunderstanding.

Using the wrong location for certain signs, such as placing the hand on the wrong part of the face, body, or space. This can affect the clarity and accuracy of the sign.

Using the wrong movement for certain signs, such as moving the hand too fast or too slow, or moving the hand in the wrong direction or pattern. This can alter the nuance and expression of the sign.

Using the wrong facial expression or non-manual signal for certain signs, such as not raising the eyebrows for yes/no questions, or not shaking the head for negations. This can affect the grammar and tone of the sign.

Using incorrect ASL syntax or word order, such as following English word order instead of ASL word order, or omitting important elements like topic or object. This can affect the coherence and logic of the sign.

These are some examples of common ASL mistakes that beginners may make. To avoid these mistakes, it is important to practice ASL with native or fluent signers, watch videos of authentic ASL usage, and learn from reliable sources and materials.

How to Learn ASL Faster

One of the best ways to learn ASL faster and easier is to get your own tutor at Talk2Practice.com. Talk2Practice.com is a website that offers live classes with certified ASL tutors who can help you improve your ASL skills and confidence. You can choose from different levels, topics, and schedules that suit your needs and goals. You can also get feedback and corrections from your tutor in real time.

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Common usage errors in ASL Level 1
Below are some common errors that ASL students made in level-one class that you can avoid. These are a few examples to help you become aware of potential errors. Beyond that, common errors or confusing similar signs are mentioned here and there in the ASL dictionary.

Error: your and you're
The ASL word your is a possessive pronoun (likewise in English), whereas you're is a contraction of you are in English. A few ASL students habitually sign your for you're based on the similar sound.

The correct English expressions "you're welcome" and "you're right" are not the same as incorrect expressions "your welcome" or "your right".

To express it correctly in ASL, one sign you right, not your right. Then again, if you're talking about "your right" as in human rights, then use a different sign for "right".

Gloss: your wrong.

This basic ASL phrase your wrong is wrong. It's equivalent to as "wrong is yours" in a possessive sense. Use YOU (pronoun) RIGHT (correct, hmm pun).

Error: she/he and his/her
A few ASL students also sometimes mix up with she/he and his/her where there is no gender in pronouns, both subject and object, in ASL. Make sure not to confuse a personal pronoun with a possessive pronoun.

Not only those are confusing, a few ASL students also sometimes use the ASL possessive pronoun their for English plural pronoun they.

Few ASL students may continue these errors into ASL 200 and further, despite that they were corrected every time. If you find yourself in this niche, break your habit.

Common production errors
Some ASL students may encounter a common production error of the following pairs of ASL signs that you can avoid to make the same mistake.

The ASL signs make and coffee with their difference in movement can be sometimes found confusing in ASL classes.

Another common confusing production is the difference of the handshape between the manual letters F and D, especially in the first classes of ASL 101.

Others: CHOCOLATE and CHURCH; ROOMMATE, MACHINE, and AMERICA.

Common semantic errors
Some ASL words have different meanings for one same ASL sign; likewise, some English words have multiple meanings for one same word. For example, the English word run can have several different meanings in their contextual sentences.

When translating from one word in a language to another, one cannot use the same word for multiple meanings in another language.

A common semantic confusion that a few ASL students may make in ASL is the English word like as in affection and as in "same as". Use different signs for these two different meanings.

Common Fingerspelling Mistakes New Signers Make
Learning TipsFingerspelling Tips
By John Miller
Friday, September 14, 2018

One of the first concepts covered in beginning or basic sign language classes is fingerspelling. There are a few common mistakes that are made by many beginner signers related to fingerspelling. Hopefully you can recognize them in your own practice and avoid making bad habits that are difficult to break.

Signing Space When Fingerspelling
First of all, the misuse of sign space is a common mistake, specifically as it is related to fingerspelling. Yes, we have an imaginary box around us, almost like a television set that is just inches above our heads and goes off to either sides of our bodies, and then ends around our waists.

However, that does not mean that all that space is fair game for fingerspelling. For right handed signers (right dominant), fingerspelling should be done in the area to the right of center of the chest. For left handed signers (left dominant), fingerspelling should be done in the area to the left of center. It should be out away from the body about 6-8 inches (not too far and not too close) and your letters should not be "thrown forward" or bounced up and down within that area.

AVOCADO

Example of fingerspelling A-V-O-C-A-D-O.
The Directional Movement While Fingerspelling
When spelling double letters or starting a new word, you should slide away from the center of your body. That is, if you are right dominant, move outward from left to right just like you were reading a book. If you are left dominant, move outward from right to left which is actually backwards from the way you read. In both cases, DON'T move back towards the center of the body. Many new signers do this and it looks so awkward to seasoned signers, they can see the mistake immediately.

ARMADILLO

Example fingerspelling A-R-M-A-D-I-L-L-O.
Notice how the double L-L slides away from the body.
Common Formation Mistakes When Fingerspelling
There are several common letter formation mistakes that new signers make. Here are a few examples to watch out for.

The letter Z is produced with the index finger NOT the little finger.
This seems to be a misconception that started with incorrect information and then caught hold with some people, but it is INCORRECT! The letter Z is produced with the index finger.

Z

Example "Z" handshape.

Use a closed E, instead of an open or "screaming" E.
Fingerspelling Example: E

The letter E should be closed (as shown below) with the finger tips tight against the hand, not opened. An open E is sometimes called a “screaming E” because it looks like an open mouth that is screaming. This is not horrible, but it is something native signers will notice as sloppy form.

The screaming E has a tighter grip at the top of the fingers with the tips pulled back very tight against the lower part of the fingers, where the correct E (with the tips resting just over the horizontal thumb) are much loser of a grip and much more comfortable.

Because you have to pull the fingertips back much tighter to make the screaming E, it slows down the flow of the signing.

E

Example "E" handshape.

Point your fingers straight out over the thumb for letters M and N.
Other letters that can slow you down when fingerspelling if done too “tight” are the letters M and N. You will often see the fingers on the M and N folded over tight over the thumb. Again, this isn’t really wrong, as much as unnecessary. If your fingers are this tight over the thumb, it slows you down in your fingerspelling as you become more fluent. Leaving the fingers pointing straight out over the thumb frees

up the hand to make faster movements while fingerspelling.

M

Example "M" handshape.
N

Example "N" handshape.
Do not use a flat hand when signing the letter O.
Fingerspelling Example: O

Fingerspelling Example: O

When signing the letter O, use a rounded O shape and do not make a flat O.

The letters O and C should face forward.
Fingerspelling Example: O

Fingerspelling Example: C

Another common mistake is that the letters O and C are turned to the side rather than facing outward like they should be. I think because many books will show a side or slightly turned angle of the hand in order for people to get the correct handshape, people think the turned O and C are the way to actually sign them. This is not correct. See the proper way below.

O

Example "O" handshape.
C

Example "C" handshape.
The letters K and P should face forward.
Fingerspelling Example: P

The letters K and P also run into that same issue. New signers want to turn them as they see them presented in books and they end up looking very awkward and uncomfortable to sign. Get the K-hand as it should be, facing forward, and then to go to the P-hand, just drop the wrist. The change from a K to a P is all wrist, nothing else.

K

Example "K" handshape.
P

Example "P" handshape.
The letters G and H should be turned sideways (so the palm faces the body).
Fingerspelling Example: H

Many books will show these letters from a different angle in an attempt to show the handshapes better. The letters G and H should be turned sideways (so the palm faces the body). See the examples below.

G

Example "G" handshape.

H

Example "H" handshape.

Don’t Read the Letter Names, Sound It Out

Whether it is you signing the letters yourself (expressive skills), or you reading others fingerspelling (receptive skills), you need to think of the sounds that are connected to those letters, and NOT the letter name itself. This will help you to be able to figure out the words better down the road as you are trying to read bigger and bigger words. You may miss a letter, but if you have been saying the sounds in your head, you will more than likely be able to figure out the word.

Try it! In the example below, don’t spell out each letter as they are signed, sound out the word.

5 Common Mistakes Made When Communicating with the Hard of Hearing

5 Common Mistakes Made When Communicating with the Hard of Hearing

Let’s say you’re about to have a conversation with a friend, loved one or even a stranger who has experienced hearing loss of some sort. What are you most apt to do? Do you increase your speaking volume? Do you make assumptions about your conversation partner?

Here are just a few of the most common mistakes people make when speaking with hard-of-hearing individuals.

Assuming by signing

One common misconception about deaf or hard-of-hearing individuals is that they “all speak sign language.” In fact, this is not the case. While many people make use of this form of communication, many use other tools to communicate, such as assistive listening devices (ALDs), hearing aids or even lip-reading. Others also may have only mild or moderate hearing loss and can make use of amplifiers or the naked ear if the conversation partner is speaking clearly enough.

Assuming hearing aids fix everything

While hearing aids have been known to work wonders for many people, there are levels of hearing loss and not all devices are cure-alls for every hard-of-hearing person. A cochlear implant, for example, may not necessarily mean that a person has maximum hearing ability. Devices such as this will help to improve the decibel level of sound but don’t always do the same for clearness of conversations, so speak with excellent diction to best communicate.

Assuming age is always a factor

While may people experience hearing loss as they age, this is not always the contributing factor. Hard-of-hearing people are comprised of only 30 percent in the 65-and-older range, in fact. That means that the odds are your encounter with a person with hearing loss will be with someone younger than 65 in most cases.

Assuming annoyance

You may find that communicating with someone with hearing loss is frustrating for both parties. In fact, you may even be asked to repeat yourself now and again—it might even seem like you’re annoying the other party. The truth is, many hard-of-hearing individuals need a little more clarification to confirm what was said, and it shouldn’t be taken personally or as an attack. The last thing you want to do is discourage your deaf or hard-of-hearing conversation partner from engaging with others.

Assuming loudness is the most important

Your first inclination when speaking to a hard-of-hearing person might be to amplify your voice. You might even yell. Just know that this, while occasionally effective, is rarely the best way to go about communicating. Yelling or speaking forcefully isn’t nearly as important as speaking clearly and maybe even more slowly than your normal pace, in cases in which the person is lip-reading. Yelling or talking more loudly than normal can actually throw off a lip-reader who’s used to seeing conversations with everyday, inside voices.

Lipreading Mom has an embarrassing confession to make. Whenever someone signs, I stare in confusion, trying to draw meaning from their moving fingers. I'm not proud to admit that while I can learn and regularly use sign language at home and church, I don't always understand what another person is signing to me. I may have sign language dyslexia. That's not an official diagnosis, nor have I ever heard of someone else having this kind of dyslexia. But it applies in my case.

Something Lipreading Mom has committed to doing is to initiate a sign language conversation with people I don't know. These are people I observe signing and/or wearing hearing aids in public. Granted, I have preschool-level sign language compression skills, but can get by with signing my introduction…

ME: Hi, are you Deaf?

STRANGER: (nods)

ME: (grinning, ear to ear) I'm hard of hearing… My name is (fingerspelled) S-H-A-N-N-A…

(awkward pause as I try to remember my signs)

STRANGER: (signs something to me)

ME: (eyes squinted at first, then pretending to understand) Yes. Okay…

(I pause. Stranger signs. I squint, then pretend to understand again.)

ME: (quickly) Okay. Nice to meet you.

Do You Have Sign Language Dyslexia?

If you can relate to my embarrassing confession, I've found the following things help.

When signing with someone, have that person stand beside you, not in front of you. Otherwise, that person's signing movements will be like a "mirror reflection" to your eyes—backwards.
Download one or more American Sign Language (ASL) apps, and practice regularly. HearingHearing.com lists several apps. One that my daughter and I use is MarleeSigns, an iTunes signing program by actress Marlee Matlin, who is deaf.
Visit events where sign language is common. Deaf Coffee Chats are an excellent way to learn sign language and are held all over the United States. Click here to see if a chat group meets in your area.
Last weekend, my hubby and I attended a launch party at sComm, manufacturer of the UbiDuo and UbiDuo2 communication devices for the Deaf. While a voice interpreter and captioning followed along, sComm Founder Jason Curry communicated from the stage in ASL. This was an excellent chance for me to go back and forth between reading the captions and watching Jason's hands move. I was able to put his ideas and thoughts together, while the captioning filled in the gaps.
Learn songs in sign language. I've found that music makes learning to sign easier, because the hand movements are more dramatic and often slower. Where I attend church, one of the ladies signs the worship music. One day, I asked her how she learned to sign the words so beautifully. Her answer: Watching YouTube videos. She finds out, in advance, what the the worship songs will be each Sunday, then she Googles the name of the song and "sign language video" on YouTube. Click here to search for sign language videos to your popular songs.

10 Easy Steps for Learning Sign Language
learning sign language
Learning sign language is a valuable and rewarding skill that can open up a new world of communication and understanding for people who are deaf or hearing impaired.

While sign language may seem intimidating at first, it is actually quite easy to learn with a few simple steps.

The Steps for Learning Sign Language
Here are 10 easy steps for getting started with sign language.

Determine which sign language you want to learn
There are several different sign languages used around the world, including American Sign Language (ASL), British Sign Language (BSL), and Auslan (Australian Sign Language). Do some research to determine which one is most relevant to your location and needs. Each sign language has its unique grammar, culture, and history, so it's important to choose the one that best fits your goals and interests.

Find online resources
The internet is a treasure trove of information and resources for learning sign language. Take advantage of free online courses, videos, and tutorials to get started.

Some popular online resources for learning sign language include:

SignLanguage101.com – offers a comprehensive ASL course for free
Lifeprint.com – provides ASL lessons, videos, and quizzes
ASL University – offers online lessons and resources for learning ASL
BSL Online – a website for learning British Sign Language
The ASL App – a mobile app for learning ASL
YouTube – has a wealth of ASL and sign language tutorials from different countries

It's also a good idea to join online sign language communities to connect with others who are learning, practicing, and using sign language. This will provide you with opportunities to practice and get feedback on your signing skills.

Purchase a sign language dictionary
A sign language dictionary is an essential tool for learning the basics of sign language. Look for a dictionary that includes clear, step-by-step illustrations of each sign and its meaning.

There are many sign language dictionaries available in both print and digital formats.

Some popular options include:

The American Sign Language Dictionary by Martin L. A. Sternberg
The Oxford Dictionary of British Sign Language by Jonathan Reid
The Complete Idiot's Guide to Sign Language by Jessie LEIGH
Signing Naturally: Student Workbook, Units 1-6 by Cheri Smith
Dictionary of American Sign Language by Rogers, Lucinda, and Hammond, Graham.

It's important to choose a dictionary that is specific to the sign language you are interested in learning. This will ensure that you are learning the correct signs and using them appropriately.

Practice regularly
The key to learning any new skill is practice. Set aside time each day to practice what you have learned, and try to use sign language in real-life situations as much as possible.

Some tips to help you practice sign language regularly and effectively:

Find a study partner or join a sign language group. Practicing with others will help you improve your skills

and build your confidence.
Watch and mimic native signers. There are many videos and resources available online that feature sign language users. Study their movements and try to imitate them.
Use flashcards to memorize signs and their meanings.
Try to incorporate sign language into your daily routines. For example, you can use signs to communicate with friends, family members, or even pets.
Regularly review what you have learned to ensure that the signs and concepts are firmly ingrained in your memory.

The more you practice sign language, the more natural it will become. Stick with it and you will see your skills improve over time.

Connect with a community
Joining a sign language group or class can help you practice and improve your skills. This can also provide opportunities to meet and communicate with other sign language users.

Here are some ways to connect with a sign language community:

Enroll in a sign language class at a local community college or language school.
Look for sign language meetups in your area. These are groups of people who come together to practice and learn sign language.
Join an online sign language forum or community. There are many websites and social media groups dedicated to sign language.
Attend sign language events and workshops. These are great opportunities to meet other sign language users and practice your skills.
Volunteer with organizations that serve the deaf and hard-of-hearing community.

Connecting with a sign language community will provide you with opportunities to practice, improve your skills, and learn more about the culture and history of sign language. It can also be a lot of fun and a great way to make new friends!

Watch sign language videos
There are many sign language videos available online, including news programs, TV shows, and movies. Watching these can help you see sign language in action and improve your comprehension.

You can find sign language videos on websites like YouTube, Vimeo, and Dailymotion. You can also find educational videos on websites like Sign Language 101 or Signing Savvy. These videos can provide a great way to practice and improve your signing skills.

Practice with a partner
Practicing with a friend or family member can help you reinforce what you have learned and improve your skills. Find someone willing to practice with you regularly.

You can practice signing words, phrases, and sentences with each other, and help each other learn by correcting mistakes and offering feedback.

Additionally, practicing with a partner allows you to practice using sign language in a conversational setting, which can help you develop better fluency. If you don’t have anyone to practice with in person, you can also find online communities or virtual language exchange partners to practice with.

Use technology
There are several apps and websites available that can help you learn sign language. Take advantage of these resources to practice your skills and test your knowledge.

There are many apps, such as Signly, Sign Language Tutor, and ASL Coach, that offer lessons, quizzes, and interactive activities to help you practice and improve your skills. Websites like Quizlet and Memrise also offer sign language flashcards and quizzes.

Additionally, there are online courses and tutorials available on platforms like Udemy and Coursera. Utilizing these resources can provide a convenient and accessible way to learn and practice sign language.

Attend workshops or events
Attending workshops or events that focus on sign language can be a great way to learn and practice in a supportive and fun environment.

These events often provide opportunities to learn from experienced sign language instructors and practice with other learners in a supportive and interactive manner. Workshops can also be a great way to learn about the culture and history of sign language and connect with the deaf community.

You can find workshops and events by checking local community centers, community colleges, or organizations that focus on sign language or deaf culture. Attending these events can help you build confidence in using sign language and provide a fun and engaging way to learn.

Don’t be afraid to make mistakes
Learning a new language is a process, and making mistakes is a natural part of that process. Don’t be discouraged by mistakes, and keep practicing until you become confident and fluent in sign language.

Making mistakes is a normal and expected part of learning any new language, including sign language. Don’t be afraid to experiment, try new signs, and ask for help when needed. The most important thing is to keep practicing and using sign language as much as possible.

With time, patience, and consistent practice, you will become more confident and fluent in your signing skills. Remember, every mistake is an opportunity to learn and improve, so embrace the journey and have fun with it!

Interesting Facts About Learning Sign Language
Sign languages have their own grammar and syntax: Sign languages have their own grammatical structures and rules, distinct from the grammar of spoken languages.

Sign languages are not universal: Each country or region has its own sign language, such as American Sign Language (ASL) and British Sign Language (BSL).

Sign language is a full language: Sign languages have the same linguistic properties as spoken languages and can be used to communicate complex ideas and abstract concepts.

Sign language is visual and spatial: Sign languages use hand gestures, facial expressions, and body movements to convey meaning.

Sign language is culturally rich: Sign languages have their own unique cultures, traditions, and communities.
Key Takeaways
By following these 10 easy steps, you can start learning sign language and become a confident and effective communicator.

Try these steps, practice regularly, and be patient with yourself as you progress. Remember, learning a new language takes time, dedication, and effort. But, the rewards of being able to communicate with the deaf and hard-of-hearing community are worth it. Good luck!

Understanding sign language can help you communicate with the deaf and hard-of-hearing community. But just like any spoken language, sign comprises a range of techniques, and contrary to popular belief, it's not a universal language, but ASL (American Sign Language) is a good starting point for beginners. Are you wondering how to learn sign language?

Thanks to the internet, however, it's easier than ever to learn sign language. Outside of the traditional classroom setup, there are numerous ways to learn this hands-on language.

Understanding the Sign Language Alphabet

Learning the sign alphabet (also called the manual alphabet) is usually the best place to start your learning journey.

The ASL sign language alphabet consists of 26 unique signs that represent the English alphabet. Some signs mimic the shape of the letter they represent, and for the most part, these are easy to get to grips with. Once you know the individual letters, you can use them to form words. This is referred to as fingerspelling, and it's a great way to communicate if you're not yet familiar with the real signs of particular words.

Beyond a Basic Understanding of Sign Language

YouTube

YouTube tutorials are great for learning sign language. There are dozens of teachers that give free lessons on ASL, and some of the best places to start include:

Dr. Bill Vicars – This ASL expert holds numerous degrees in deaf-centric studies, and his love for languages is evident in his tutorials.

Expert Village – You can find just about any tutorial on Expert Village, including practical and informative ASL lessons for beginners. They also feature extensive coverage on common phrases and the sign language alphabet.

Laura Berg Life – What used to be known as "My Smart Hands" is a channel dedicated to teaching ASL to adults and children alike. The videos on this channel provide guidance on common phrases and feature a section answering viewer questions.

Resources on the Internet

Although video tutorials are great for learning sign language, you'll also find a plethora of web-based resources that teach people the basics of ASL. Here's a look at some of the best websites for learning sign:

ASL Pro – ASL Pro might have an old-school interface, but the free tool is home to an abundance of quizzes, fingerspelling practices, and a detailed dictionary with video examples of signing hundreds of words.

Start ASL – Start ASL offers a wide variety of courses on learning sign language. The free three-level

course offers workbooks and activities as well as fingerspelling lessons. For those who need something more advanced, the pad courses (online and offline versions are available) are ideal since they were created by professional ASL instructors.

SignASL.org – SignASL.org is an online ASL dictionary and an excellent resource for finding words and phrases and their corresponding signs. Once you search a specific word or phrase, the site displays a selection of videos and other learning resources from trusted sites you can use to learn the basics.

Apps to Help You Understand Sign Language

Most of us are inseparable from our smartphones, so it only makes sense that we use them to our advantage. ASL learning apps are great for when you need to quickly lookup a phrase or word's sign and allows you to study anywhere, at any time. Here are some apps we recommend:

ASL Coach – ASL Coach is a free iOS app that's straightforward and easy to use. It focuses on the ASL alphabet and has a range of other exciting features.

ASL: Fingerspelling – Designed by Lifeprint, an ASL resource, this iOS app can help you perfect the art of fingerspelling, as the name suggests.

Marlee Signs – Marlee Matlin, the Oscar-winning deaf actress, features on this app that teaches ASL with videos and fingerspelling lessons.

Now You Better Understand Sign Language!

Learning sign language can be an enriching experience. As you advance through your journey, you might find that you have a natural-born talent that can help you pursue a career in sign language interpreting or the likes. For more guidance on the topic of ASL and interpreting, be sure to check out our blog!

Everybody knows that learning a foreign language isn't exactly an easy thing to do, and it can be even more challenging to learn American Sign Language because you are also learning to communicate with your hands. American Sign Language (ASL) is the used by many people including people who are hearing impaired, teachers, interpreters, and more.

If you're looking to learn sign language in the near future, here are helpful tips to help you get started:

Fingerspelling: Sign language includes a sign for each letter, which is very helpful when it comes to saying proper names, or trying to say a word for which you do not know the sign. Practice your fingerspelling often, and do it in front of a mirror so you can be sure it looks clear.

Continuous Review: When learning any language, it helps to build a strong foundation of vocabulary, and then continue growing it. This means taking time each day to review words you already know, and then add some new vocabulary into the mix.

Mnemonic Techniques & Creative Memory Tricks: If you simply cannot remember the sign for a particular word, coming up with a creative memory trick might help. Some people like wordplay, while others like to break down the sign into a few easier motions. Find whatever technique works best for you, and then use it when necessary.

Draw the Sign: Just as writing down words helps us to remember them, drawing different signs will help you in understanding and memorizing their distinctions. Try drawing each new sign you learn five times, and also writing its spoken English translation next to it.

Find Your Dominant Hand: Just like with writing, eating and playing sports, sign language requires you to use one hand much more often than the other. To make things less confusing for your deaf and hard of hearing friends, be sure you pick one dominant hand and stick to it, rather than switching things up in the middle of conversation.

Look Up Words (as needed): Anytime you think of a word for which you would like to know the sign, you

ought to look it up as soon as possible so that you do not forget to do so. Try carrying around a small ASL English dictionary, or downloading an app on your smartphone, to make things easier.
Immersion: Finally, once you feel confident enough to engage in simple conversation, you ought to test your skills by meeting with as many fellow ASL speakers as possible. Your community likely has groups and clubs for deaf and hard of hearing people, and those clubs will often allow hearing people to join in if they can communicate using ASL. Make sure you take advantage of these helpful resources.
ASL is like any other language, your skill level correlates with your environment, resources and willingness to learn. No matter what approach you take, it's important to practice, practice and practice some more. If you or a loved one is hard of hearing or deaf and have questions about ASL or anything related to hearing loss or hearing aids, don't hesitate to contact us today.

Sign language, like the spoken word, takes many different forms.

There are more than 300 different sign languages in use around the world. They vary from nation to nation.

Even in countries where the same language is spoken, sign language can have many different regional accents that bring subtle variations to people's use and understanding of signs.

While there are similarities between some of the most common sign languages, there are also many differences.

And it's not just the signs that vary. The speaker's facial expressions, gestures, and body language can all have a significant bearing on how a sign language is communicated, which is why there are so many different forms of sign language, not just in the UK but around the world.

Like spoken language, different groups and cultures develop their own ways of communicating unique to where they live. For example, British and American natives both speak English as their primary verbal language. However, American Sign Language and British Sign Language differ significantly.

This is where many businesses and organisations continue to struggle to communicate with Deaf and Hard of Hearing communities.

However, most professional sign language interpreters have the skills and knowledge to understand and translate the subtle differences in sign language to a local audience, to help businesses make their services more accessible and support their Deaf employees and customers.

What is British Sign Language?
As its name suggests, British Sign Language (BSL) is the most widely used sign language in the UK.

There are around 151,000 BSL users in the UK, and about 87,000 users are Deaf.

It is also used by the families and relatives of Deaf people, sign language interpreters and BSL learners.

BSL has its own vocabulary, grammar and syntax and, as a language, is not dependant on spoken English.

In 2003, the Government recognised BSL as an official minority language. BSL is part of BANZSL, which comprises Australian Sign Language (Auslan) and New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL). All are derived from the same sign language system used in 19th Century Britain.

However, national variations exist, meaning that a Deaf person from Australia or New Zealand may have difficulties communicating with a BSL user and vice versa.

Even within the UK, different regions have their own unique dialects and colloquialisms. This means that a

Deaf person from the south of England, for example, may use different signs to someone from Scotland or the north.

So, although BSL is widely used by profoundly Deaf people in the UK, Hard of Hearing people, of which there are 11 million in the UK, use different forms of communication support such as lip readers, speech to text reporters and palantypists.

Due to the different signs used across different regions, Sign Solutions provides local in-person interpreters to match the requirements of local Deaf BSL users, so the signs are familiar.

We also provide remote BSL video interpreters with experience of various regional signs, so that businesses or organisations looking to make their products, services, information or work more accessible to the Deaf community can provide on-demand access to BSL interpreters, enabling instant communication between Deaf and Hearing people.

Does sign language differ between countries?
As we said above, around 300 sign languages are used worldwide today, and most of them vary significantly.

Along with BSL, there are several sign languages used by English-speaking countries, including the US (ASL), Auslan and NZSL. Ireland also has its own sign language (ISL), which is derived from French Sign Language but shares similarities with BSL.

One of the most widely used sign languages around the world is Chinese Sign Language (CSL or ZGS), which has up to 20 million users.
Brazilian Sign Language has around three million users worldwide, while Indo-Pakistani Sign Language has about 1.8 million users across South Asia.

Back in the UK, Sign Support English (SSE) and Makaton are both used alongside BSL to support Deaf and Hard of Hearing people with additional learning needs.

Which sign language is universally understood?
While there isn't a single universal sign language, there are signs that are internationally recognised. However, BSL is the system used by most of the UK's Deaf community.

The Deaf community has always faced barriers when accessing public services. So, providers still need to do more to offer alternative forms of contact in-person and remotely that enable Deaf people equal access.

Using an experienced interpreter who understands the subtle differences between BSL dialects and other sign language systems is essential. They can help break down barriers by enabling your organisation to communicate better with a Deaf audience.

Other forms of communication used by Deaf and Hard of Hearing users also need to be considered and offered. Let's say, for example, that a Deaf Albanian Sign Language user wished to communicate with an English-speaking hearing person. In this scenario, we would use a BSL Deaf relay and a BSL interpreter to provide the interpretation from Albanian Sign Language into BSL. It would then be interpreted by a BSL interpreter to the hearing person.

We provide BSL interpreting and translation services, plus expert consultancy, to help ensure your organisation is as accessible as possible, to attract and serve Deaf customers and offer equal opportunities for Deaf job applicants.

All the skilled BSL interpreters we work with are DBS-checked and NRCPD-registered and can provide a high-quality service to Deaf people across the UK.

We can also provide a range of accredited communications professionals for Deaf, Deafblind and Hard of Hearing users.

To find out more, and for expert advice on which type of communication support will meet your needs, give us a call on 0843 178 0773, email bookings@signsolutions.uk.com or contact us via a BSL video interpreter.

There are perhaps three hundred sign languages in use around the world today. The number is not known with any confidence; new sign languages emerge frequently through creolization and de novo (and occasionally through language planning). In some countries, such as Sri Lanka and Tanzania, each school for the deaf may have a separate language, known only to its students and sometimes denied by the school; on the other hand, countries may share sign languages, although sometimes under different names (Croatian and Serbian, Indian and Pakistani). Deaf sign languages also arise outside educational institutions, especially in village communities with high levels of congenital deafness, but there are significant sign languages developed for the hearing as well, such as the speech-taboo languages used in aboriginal Australia. Scholars are doing field surveys to identify the world's sign languages.[1][2][3][4]

The following list is grouped into three sections :

Deaf sign languages, which are the preferred languages of Deaf communities around the world; these include village sign languages, shared with the hearing community, and Deaf-community sign languages
Auxiliary sign languages, which are not native languages but sign systems of varying complexity, used alongside spoken languages. Simple gestures are not included, as they do not constitute language.
Signed modes of spoken languages, also known as manually coded languages, which are bridges between signed and spoken languages
The list of deaf sign languages is sorted regionally and alphabetically, and such groupings should not be taken to imply any genetic relationships between these languages (see List of language families).[5]

Sign language list
Contemporary deaf sign languages
Africa
There are at least 25 sign languages in Africa, according to researcher Nobutaka Kamei.[6][7][8] Some have distributions that are completely independent of those of African spoken languages. At least 13 foreign sign languages, mainly from Europe and America, have been introduced to at least 27 African nations; some of the 23 sign languages documented by Kamei have originated with or been influenced by them.

Language Origin[9] Notes
Adamorobe Sign Language village sign (ADS) (Ghana)
Algerian Sign Language French
Bamako Sign Language local deaf community used by adult men. Threatened by ASL.
Berbey Sign Language family Dogon region, Mali [1]
Bouakako Sign Language village Ivory Coast
Bura Sign Language village in Nigeria
Burkina Sign Language local[10] Ouagadougou (Langue des Signes Mossi)
Chadian Sign Language ASL:Nigerian?
Douentza Sign Language local? village? Dogon region, Mali
Eritrean Sign Language creole
Eswatini Sign Language Irish, British, & local
Ethiopian sign languages 1 million signers of an unknown number of languages
Francophone African Sign Language ASL & spoken French The development of ASL in Francophone West Africa
Gambian Sign Language ASL
Ghanaian Sign Language ASL (GSE)

Guinean Sign Language ASL
Guinea-Bissau Sign Language local incipient/basic
Hausa Sign Language local "Maganar Hannu" (HSL) – Northern Nigeria (Kano State)
Kenyan Sign Language local? (KSL or LAK)
Lesotho Sign Language BANZL
Libyan Sign Language Arab?
Malagasy Sign Language French:Danish:Norwegian (or "Madagascan Sign Language") May be a dialect of Norwegian SL
Maroua Sign Language local Cameroon
Mauritian Sign Language isolate
Moroccan Sign Language ASL
Mozambican Sign Language
Mbour Sign Language local M'Bour, Senegal
Namibian Sign Language Paget-Gorman
Nanabin Sign Language village a deaf family in Nanabin, Ghana
Nigerian Sign Language ASL
Rwandan Sign Language
Sao Tome and Principe Sign Language rural
Sierra Leonean Sign Language ASL
Somali Sign Language Kenyan SL
South African Sign Language Irish & British (SASL)
Sudanese sign languages village & local? Government proposal to unify local languages
Tanzanian sign languages local (seven independent languages, one for each deaf school in Tanzania, with little mutual influence)
Tebul Sign Language village (Tebul Ure SL) Mopti, Mali (village of Tebul Ure)
Tunisian Sign Language French:Italian
Ugandan Sign Language local? (USL)
Yoruba Sign Language local (YSL)
Zambian Sign Language (ZASL)
Zimbabwean sign languages "sign language" is an official language
Americas
Language Origin Notes
American Sign Language United States and Canada ASL is also officially recognized as a language in Canada due to the passage of Bill C-81, the Accessible Canada Act. Black American Sign Language is a dialect of ASL.
Argentine Sign Language Spain and Italy[citation needed] (Lengua de Señas Argentina – LSA)
Bay Islands Sign Language village Honduras. Deaf-blind. French Harbour Sign Language
Bolivian Sign Language ASL/Andean "Lenguaje de Señas Bolivianas" (LSB)
Brazilian Sign Language French Libras (Lingua Brasileira de Sinais)[11]
Recognized legally as a means of communication among the Brazilian Deaf community.[12]
Bribri Sign Language village?
Brunca Sign Language village?
Carhuahuaran Sign Language family Peru
Chatino Sign Language family
Chilean Sign Language French? Lenguaje de Señas Chileno (LSCH)
Colombian Sign Language Andean (CSN) / Lengua de Señas Colombiana (LSC)
Costa Rican Sign Language at least four languages in Costa Rica (Woodward 1991)
Old Costa Rican Sign Language
Cuban Sign Language
Dominican Sign Language ASL
Ecuadorian Sign Language Andean
Greenlandic Sign Language Danish "Kalaallisut Ussersuutit" (DTS)
Guatemalan Sign Language
Guyanese Sign Language ?
Haitian Sign Language ASL

Honduras Sign Language Mexican? "Lengua de señas hondureña" (LESHO)
Inmaculada Sign Language Peruvian Lima, Peru. Inmaculada is a school for the deaf. (see ref under Sivia SL)
Inuit Sign Language village "Inuit Uqausiqatigiit Uukturausiq Uqajuittunut (General Inuit Sign Language for deaf)" [citation needed] also known as Tikuraq ( )
There may be more than one. The indigenous languages is an isolate.
Jamaican Sign Language ASL (JSL)
Jamaican Country Sign Language local (JCSL)
Kajana Sign Language village Kajana Gebarentaal
Keresan Sign Language village (KPISL)
Macushi Sign Language ? Brazil [no data]
Marajo Sign Language home sign? Brazil
Maritime Sign Language British
Maxakali Sign Language home sign? if not home sign, at least a young language. Brazil
Mayan Sign Language village
Mexican Sign Language French "Lengua de señas mexicana" (LSM)
Navajo Sign Language
Nicaraguan Sign Language local "Idioma de señas nicaragüense" (ISN)
Old Cayman Sign Language village gave rise to Providence Island SL?
Panamanian Sign Language ASL, some Salvadoran influence "Lengua de señas panameñas"
Paraguayan Sign Language related to Uruguayan, Old-French Sign Language "Lengua de Señas Paraguaya" (LSPy)
Papiu Yanomama Sign Language ? Brazil [no data]
Peruvian Sign Language Andean[13] "Lengua de señas peruana"
Plains Sign Language historically a trade pidgin distinct from national norms national forms maintained by some Plains nations
Puerto Rican Sign Language ASL "Lengua de señas puertorriqueña"
Providence Island Sign Language village
Quebec Sign Language French-ASL mix "Langue des Signes Québécoise" (LSQ)
Salvadoran Sign Language LESSA "Lengua de señas salvadoreña"
Sivia Sign Language village Peru
South Rupununi Sign Language village? Guyana
Terena Sign Language village Brazil
Trinidad and Tobago Sign Language isolate? ASL taught in schools; most deaf bilingual
Uruguayan Sign Language Old French Sign Language "Lengua de Señas Uruguaya"
Ka'apor Sign Language village (a.k.a. Urubu Sign Language, although this name is pejorative)
Venezuelan Sign Language isolate "Lengua de señas venezolana" (LSV)
Asia-Pacific
Language Origin Notes
Afghan Sign Language indig, or ASL creole?
Alipur Sign Language village
Amami Oshima Sign Language village or idioglossia Japan
Auslan British (Australian Sign Language)
Ban Khor Sign Language village (Plaa Pag is a dialect)
Bhutanese Sign Language ?
Burmese sign language ASL may be two languages
Cambodian Sign Language = mixed LSF, BSL, ASL, various dialects within
Chinese Sign Language Chinese " " (ZGS)
Enga Sign Language village PNG
Esharani isolate Iranian Sign Language, main sign language used in Iran
Filipino Sign Language mixed ASL, various dialects (FSL) or Philippine Sign Language (Filipino: Wikang pasenyas ng mga Pilipino).
Ghandruk Sign Language village (Nepal)
Hawai i Sign Language HSL Indigenous unique sign language, Hoailona Ōlelo o Hawai i[14][15][16][17]
Hong Kong Sign Language Shanghai Sign Language " " (HKSL). Derives from the southern dialect of

CSL.
Huay Hai Sign Language village (Thailand) [no data]
Indo-Pakistani Sign Language Indian conflicting reports on whether Indian and Pakistani SL are one language or two.
Jakarta Sign Language ASL:Malaysian?:Indonesian a variety of Indonesian Sign Language
Japanese Sign Language Japanese "Nihon Shuwa ( )" (JSL)
Jhankot Sign Language village (Nepal)
Jumla Sign Language village (Nepal)
Kailge Sign Language village, perhaps related to SSSL PNG
Kata Kolok village (a.k.a. Bali Sign Language, Benkala Sign Language)
Laotian Sign Language (related to Vietnamese languages; may be more than one SL)
Korean Sign Language (KSDSL) Japanese " (or)" / "Hanguk Soo-hwa"
Korean standard sign language – manually coded spoken Korean

Macau Sign Language Shanghai Sign Language " " (MSL). Derives from the southern dialect of CSL.
Malaysian Sign Language ASL "Bahasa Isyarat Malaysia" (BIM)
Maldivian Sign Language (Dhivehi Sign Language) Indian, ASL
Maunabudhuk–Bodhe Sign Language village Nepal
Mehek Sign Language home sign? incipient? PNG
Miyakubo Sign Language village Japan
Mongolian Sign Language ? "Монгол дохионы хэл"
Mount Avejaha Sign Language village PNG
Na Sai Sign Language village (Thailand) [no data]
Naga Sign Language village? (India) last reported in 1921
Nepali Sign Language Indian Indigenous sign language with inputs from Indian Sign Language, American Sign Language, International Sign, and others
New Zealand Sign Language British (NZSL)
Old Bangkok Sign Language local (or village?)
Old Chiangmai Sign Language local (or village?)
Papua New Guinean Sign Language British
Penang Sign Language local (Malaysia)
Rennellese Sign Language home sign, not a full language (Solomon Islands)
Rossel Island Sign Language village PNG
Samoan Sign Language Auslan
Selangor Sign Language ASL? (Malaysia)
Sinasina Sign Language village? PNG, not clear if developed
Singapore Sign Language French A blend of ASL, Auslan, BSL, SEE2, SSL and locally-developed signs.
Solomon Islands Sign Language
Sri Lankan sign languages local (14 deaf schools with different languages)
Taiwanese Sign Language Japanese / Taiwan Ziran Shouyu
Tibetan Sign Language local
Thai Sign Language ASL (TSL) " " (incl. Hai Yai)
Vietnamese sign languages local (Hanoi Sign Language, Ho Chi Minh Sign Language, Haiphong Sign Language; some may be related to some of the Thai languages)
Wanib Sign Language village PNG
Yogyakarta Sign Language ASL:Malaysian?:Indonesian a variety of Indonesian Sign Language
Yolŋu Sign Language local
Europe
Language Origin Notes
Albanian Sign Language "Gjuha e Shenjave Shqipe"
Armenian Sign Language isolate
Azerbaijani Sign Language French:Austro-Hungarian "Az rbaycan işar t dili" (AİD)
Austrian Sign Language French:Austro-Hungarian "Österreichische Gebärdensprache" (ÖGS)
British Sign Language British (BSL)
Bulgarian Sign Language French:Austro-Hungarian:Russian

Catalan Sign Language Catalan (or "Catalonian Sign Language") "Llengua de Signes Catalana" (LSC)
Croatian Sign Language French:Austro-Hungarian:Yugoslav (Croslan) "Hrvatski Znakovni Jezik" (HZJ)[18]
Czech Sign Language French:Austro-Hungarian "Český znakový jazyk" (ČZJ)
Cypriot Sign Language ASL×GSL "Κυπριακή Νοη ατική Γλώσσα" (CSL) [19]
Danish Sign Language French "Dansk Tegnsprog" (DTS)
Dutch Sign Language French "Nederlandse Gebarentaal" (NGT)
Estonian Sign Language "Eesti viipekeel"
Finnish Sign Language Swedish "Suomalainen viittomakieli" (SVK)
Finland-Swedish Sign Language Swedish "finlandssvenskt teckenspråk" (Swedish) or "suomenruotsalainen viittomakieli" (Finnish). A single Swedish school in Finland, now closed.
Flemish Sign Language Belgian "Vlaamse Gebarentaal" (VGT)
French Sign Language "Langues des Signes Française" (LSF)
Georgian Sign Language ? [2]
German Sign Language German "Deutsche Gebärdensprache" (DGS)
Greek Sign Language French-ASL mix "Ελληνική Νοη ατική Γλώσσα" (GSL)
Hungarian Sign Language "Magyar jelnyelv"
Icelandic Sign Language French:Danish "Íslenskt Táknmál"
Irish Sign Language French "Teanga Chomharthaíochta na hÉireann" (ISL/ISG and TCÉ)
Italian Sign Language French "Lingua dei Segni Italiana" (LIS)
Kosovar Sign Language French:Austro-Hungarian:Yugoslav "Gjuha e Shenjave Kosovare" (GjShK)
Latvian Sign Language French "Latviešu zīmju valoda"
Lithuanian Sign Language "Lietuvių gestų kalba"
Macedonian Sign Language French:Austro-Hungarian:Yugoslav Македонски знаковен јазик / Makedonski znakoven jazik
Maltese Sign Language "Lingwi tas-Sinjali Maltin" (LSM)
Northern Ireland Sign Language British (mixed)
Norwegian Sign Language French:Danish "Tegnspråk" (NSL)
Polish Sign Language Old-French, German "Polski Język Migowy" (PJM)
Portuguese Sign Language Swedish "Língua Gestual Portuguesa" (LGP)
Romanian Sign Language French "Limbaj Mimico-Gestual Românesc" (LMG)
Russian Sign Language French:Austro-Hungarian "Russkiy zhestovyi yazyk" / русский жестовый язык
Slovakian Sign Language "Slovenský posunkový jazyk"
Slovenian Sign Language French:Austro-Hungarian:Yugoslav "Slovenski znakovni jezik" (SZJ)
Spanish Sign Language isolate "Lengua de signos española" (LSE)
Swedish Sign Language Swedish "Svenskt teckenspråk" (STS)
Swiss-French Sign Language French? "Langage Gestuelle"
Swiss-German Sign Language French? "Deutschschweizer Gebärdensprache" (DSGS)
Swiss-Italian Sign Language French?
Turkish Sign Language Isolate "Türk İşaret Dili" (TİD)
Ukrainian Sign Language French "Українська жестова мова (УЖМ)"
Valencian Sign Language "Llengua de Signes en la Comunitat Valenciana" (LSCV)
Walloon Sign Language Belgian "Langue des Signes de Belgique Francophone" (LSFB)
Yugoslav Sign Language French:Austro-Hungarian
Middle East
Language Origin Notes
Al-Sayyid Bedouin Sign Language village (ABSL), Negev Israel
Central Taurus Sign Language village Turkey
Egyptian Sign Language Arab
Emirati Sign Language Arab
Ghardaia Sign Language village (Algerian Jewish Sign Language) deaf & hearing, Algeria → Israel
Iraqi Sign Language Arab لغة الاشارة العراقية Perhaps close to Levantine.
Israeli Sign Language Large lexical base from DGS שפת סימנים ישראלית (שס"י SHaSI)
Jordanian Sign Language Arab, Levantine Lughat il-Ishaarah il-Urduniah / لغة الاشارة الأردنية (LIU)
Kafr Qasem Sign Language Arab, village Kafr Qasim Israel

Kurdish Sign Language local ZHK
Kuwaiti Sign Language Arab لغة الاشارة الكويتية
Lebanese Sign Language Arab, Levantine Lughat al-Isharat al-Lubnaniya / لغة الإشارات اللبنانية
Mardin Sign Language family one extended family in Turkey[20]
Omani Sign Language Arab?
Palestinian Sign Language Arab, Levantine "لغة الاشارات الفلسطينية"
Persian Sign Language Persian زبان اشاره پارسی
Qahvehkhaneh Sign Language urban Tehran. Moribund.
Qatari Unified Sign Language Artificial/Arab Unclear what the Qatari deaf community actually uses. An artificial attempt to standardize all Arab sign languages has resulted in a variety used mainly by hearing Qatari interpreters.
Saudi Sign Language isolate "لغة الإشارة السعودية"
Seraglio Sign Language Ottoman court
Syrian Sign Language Arab, Levantine
Yemeni Sign Language Arab "لغة الإشارة اليمنية"
Historical deaf sign languages
Martha's Vineyard Sign Language
Old French Sign Language – ancestral to the French family
Old Kent Sign Language
Auxiliary sign languages
Baby Sign – using signs to assist early language development in young children.
Contact Sign – a pidgin or contact language between a spoken language and a sign language, e.g. Pidgin Sign English (PSE).
Curwin Hand Signs – a technique which allows musical notes to be communicated through hand signs.
International Sign (previously known as Gestuno) – an auxiliary language used by deaf people in international settings.
Makaton – a system of signed communication used by and with people who have speech, language or learning difficulties.
Mofu-Gudur Sign Language
Monastic sign language
Signalong – international sign assisted communication techniques used to support children and adults with communication or learning difficulties
Manual modes of spoken languages
Further information: Manually coded language
Manual modes of spoken languages include:

General
Cued Speech – a hand/mouth system (HMS) to render spoken language phonemes visually intelligible.
Fingerspelling – alphabetic signs to represent the written form of a spoken language.
English
Manually Coded English
Signing Exact English (SEE2)
Makaton
Malay
Bahasa Malaysia Kod Tangan (BMKT)
Speech-taboo languages
Caucasian Sign Language
Australian Aboriginal sign languages (though Yolŋu Sign Language does not correspond to any one language, and doubles as a language of the deaf)
Genetic classification of sign languages
Main article: Sign language § Classification
Languages are assigned families (implying a genetic relationships between these languages) as British, Swedish (perhaps a branch of BSL), French (with branches ASL (American), Austro-Hungarian, Danish, Italian), German, Japanese, and language isolates.

BANZSL family tree
Old British Sign Language
(c. 1760–1900)
Maritime SL
(c. 1860–present) Swedish SL family?
(c. 1800–present)
Papua NG SL
(c. 1990–present) Auslan
(c. 1860–present) New Zealand SL
(c. 1870–present) British SL
(c. 1900–present) Northern Ireland SL
(c. 1920–present) South African SL
(c. 1860–present)

Danish Sign Language family tree
French Sign
(c. 1760–present) local/home sign
Danish Sign
(c. 1800–present)
Faroese Sign
(c. 1960–present) Greenlandic Sign
(c. 1950–present) Icelandic Sign
(c. 1910–present) Norwegian Sign
(c. 1820–present)
Malagasy Sign
(c. 1950–present)

French Sign Language family tree
Old French Sign Language
(influenced by l'Epée c. 1760–89)
Belgian Sign Language
(c. 1790–2000) Austro-Hungarian Sign Language
(c. 1780–1920)
American Sign Language
(c. 1820–present) French Sign Language
(c. 1790–present) French Belgian Sign Language
(c. 1970–present) Flemish Sign Language
(c. 1970–present) Dutch Sign Language
(c. 1790–present) Italian Sign Language
(c. 1830–present)

Swedish Sign Language family tree
Old British Sign Language?
(c. 1760–1900)
Swedish Sign Language
(c. 1800–present)
Portuguese Sign Language
(c. 1820–present) Finnish Sign Language
(c. 1850–present)
Cape Verdian Sign Language
(c. 20th century–present) Finland-Swedish Sign Language
(c. 1850–present) Eritrean Sign Language
(c. 1950–present)
São Tomé and Príncipe Sign Language?
(c. 21st century–present)

See also
Contact sign
Intercultural competence
Legal recognition of sign languages
List of sign languages by number of native signers
Manual alphabet
Sign language
World Federation of the Deaf
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September 1, 2023 by Amanda Ruggiero

In today's diverse and interconnected world, promoting inclusivity is not just a buzzword but a vital aspect of fostering understanding, empathy, and unity. This month, September, is Deaf Awareness Month, and we want to discuss breaking down the communication barriers the Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing (D/HoH) community faces.

At Easterseals New Jersey, our Career Pathways Connections program provides opportunities for individuals in the D/HoH community to enter the workforce and obtain sustainable employment. We help our participants identify their skill sets to find where they want to take their career goals. We also work to shed light on effective strategies companies can utilize to enhance their accessibility in the workplace. Today, we want to spread these effective strategies with YOU, not only to use in your workplace but in your communities.

Educate Yourself
Understanding Deaf culture, history, and the challenges faced by D/HoH individuals is essential. You can better navigate conversations and interactions by educating yourself on communication methods (such as sign language) and assistive technologies. You can start by looking here to find an easy mobile app: ihttps://geekflare.com/sign-language-learning-apps/

Learn Basic Sign Language

While learning a new language may seem daunting, picking up basic sign language can go a long way. Familiarize yourself with common signs, the finger-spelling alphabet, and simple phrases. This effort shows your willingness to bridge the communication gap. A resource that can help with this is: https://www.educationalappstore.com/best-apps/best-apps-for-learning-sign-language

Maintain Eye Contact and Facial Expressions
When engaging in a conversation, maintaining eye contact and using facial expressions can help convey your emotions and intentions more effectively. This visual communication is essential for building a strong connection.

Use Clear and Simple Language
Using clear and straightforward language is crucial when communicating in writing or speech. Avoid jargon, complicated vocabulary, or unnecessary slang. This approach benefits not only D/HoH individuals but also promotes effective communication with everyone.

Respect Communication Preferences
It's important to ask D/HoH individuals about their preferred communication method. Some might prefer sign language, while others may rely on lip reading, writing, or technology-assisted methods. Respecting their choice demonstrates your commitment to effective interaction.

Make Use of Technology

Modern technology offers a variety of tools that facilitate communication with D/HoH individuals. Text messaging, video calls with captioning, and instant messaging apps are just a few examples. Utilizing these platforms helps bridge communication gaps and promotes inclusivity. You can check out some of the tools here:https://www.vocovision.com/blog/assistive-technology-deaf-hard-of-hearing/

Provide Accommodations
Ensure accommodations are in place in various settings, such as workplaces, events, and educational institutions. This could include sign language interpreters, video captioning services, and accessible materials.

Avoid Patronizing Behavior
Treating D/HoH individuals respectfully means treating them as equals, not as people needing pity or special treatment. Avoid shouting, speaking unnaturally slow, or over-exaggerating your lip movements. These actions can be condescending and counterproductive.

Foster an Inclusive Environment
Inclusivity extends beyond individual interactions. Advocate for Deaf-friendly policies and practices in your community. Encourage using sign language interpreters at public events, captioned content in media, and accessible facilities.

Listen and Learn
Engage in conversations with D/HoH individuals to learn about their experiences, challenges, and perspectives. By actively listening and seeking to understand, you contribute to a more inclusive society.

Being more inclusive of Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals requires a combination of empathy, education, and effort. By taking the time to learn about Deaf culture and communication methods, as well as respecting their preferences and using available technology, you can play an essential role in breaking down communication barriers and creating a more inclusive world for everyone. Remember, inclusivity benefits us all and strengthens the fabric of our diverse society. If you or anyone you know is a part of the D/HoH population and is looking for help entering the workforce and obtaining sustainable employment, please contact us at 855.215.4541 or go to eastersealsnj.org.

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7 Ways to Create Inclusive Workplaces for Deaf Employees
Deaf inclusive workplaces
Home
Future of work
Latest Insights
7 Ways to Create Inclusive Wor...
When organisations address accessibility, similar to people with other disabilities, they can help reduce this gap as deaf people overcome barriers to access work.
January 3, 2023
Inclusive Futures
Future of Work
Wellbeing
Approximately 11.5% of the U.S. population has hearing loss. Globally, this number is expected to expand to one in four people. According to the World Health Organization, that’s equivalent to 2.5 billion people by 2050 — a significant number of workers navigating a world that wasn’t set up for them.

The National Deaf Center reports that despite having a strong U.S. labour market, deaf people were on the bench. In 2017, about 53% of deaf people were employed. This is in contrast to about 75.8% of hearing people resulting in an employment gap of around 22.5%. Although employment rates for disabled people rose in 2021, overall they are still significantly behind their non-disabled peers. Last year, almost 14 million more people would have been employed if disabled people were employed at the same rate as their non-disabled counterparts

When organisations address accessibility, similar to people with other disabilities, they can help reduce this gap as deaf people overcome barriers to access work. This includes making accommodations for deaf people that can help others as well such as using closed captioning. Displaying text in the same language as the audio has become mainstream — closed captioning isn’t limited to people with hearing loss. Younger generations prefer it, with or without hearing loss. For instance, it helps them better understand audio on social media.

When companies create inclusive workplaces for everyone such as Baby Boomer silver workers,

LGBTQ+, and deaf people, they open the door to a population of workers with valuable skills and contributions. Direct communication, staying focused in the conversation, and reading body language are important assets that deaf people possess that are applicable to every industry. Considering deaf people have overcome challenges, adaptability is one of their strengths that transcends the job. They're typically flexible, patient, and problem-solvers. Since it's often hard to for deaf people to secure work, when they do, they're often loyal, dependable, responsible, and loyal — all valuable assets to every workplace.

When given the opportunity to contribute to the workforce, they step up. Four years ago, online retail company Zalando's started a hiring initiative for Deaf people and has hired 22 Deaf workers as of 2020 as part of their workforce from 90 countries. Madeleine Friedrich, severely disabled employee representative at Zalando Logistics, said their Deaf colleagues are not quiet.

"They make themselves heard and seen in different ways, and thereby have opened up our minds to new ways of interacting with each other. We can all learn from one another and gain new perspectives."

As many friendships have formed beyond work relationships, Friedrich's colleague, Coskun Karakus, corporate social worker, has seen a "massive cultural benefit for Zalando translates into long-term gains for business, though they may not be measurable or visible immediately. People are becoming more aware of each other and are being more supportive. I think that a diverse workforce makes a company more human and grounded."

What is deafness?

The definition of being deaf is either total or partial hearing loss that's so severe that the level of hearing is very low. Someone who's considered hard of hearing has a hearing loss where there's enough hearing so a hearing aid or another auditory device provides support to hear speech.

There are three types of hearing loss: sensorineural hearing loss, conductive hearing loss, and mixed hearing loss. Sensorineural hearing loss is the most common type of hearing loss. It occurs when the inner ear or the hearing nerve Is damaged and can be due to aging, exposure to loud noise, injury, and more. In conductive hearing loss, sound waves in the outer or middle ear aren't able to transmit to the inner ear. Mixed hearing loss occurs when people have a combination of both sensorineural and conductive hearing loss.

Similar to a distinction among the type of hearing loss, there's also a distinction of when to use "deaf" or "Deaf." It should be lowercase when referring to a hearing-loss condition or a deaf person who prefers to use lowercase.

The capitalized word should be used for people identifying with the Deaf community or when they capitalize it by describing themselves as sharing a sign language and culture. Typically, Deaf with a capital D is used when people were born Deaf or were Deaf before they started talking and used sign language as their first language.

Here are seven ways to make the workplace deaf accessible

Embrace technology

Determine what deaf people need as you build an effective workplace. This could be screen magnifiers, refreshable braille, and more. To bring their best selves to work, organisations need to be open to making reasonable adjustments. This includes researching the latest technology that can help make the workplace more inclusive.

Explore outside resources

For instance, a deafblind employee may request a job coach or mobility instructor. Agencies like the

Massachusetts Commission for the Blind have these coaches and instructors available. In addition, they will not cost your company. Research what's available in Europe, too to see discover more resources.

Alter your communications

Make it more accessible. If you put cookies in the lunchroom, instead of just leaving a note, send everyone an email. This extends to safety as well. At Zalando, deaf workers are equipped with phones that vibrate and alert them in case of a fire.

Research inclusive communication methods

This could be sign language interpreters, speech-to-text reporters, electronic notetakers, lip speakers, and more. When organisations expand communication methods, deaf workers become enabled and empowered to show up as their full selves.

Bring an interpreter

Ensure workers have full access to information that's presented at gatherings and presentations which can include social events like team holiday parties.

Review and adjust your recruitment process

Determine how you can improve access to work. Is your website accessible? Is it deaf-friendly? Does it promote inclusivity and encourage applications from a wide range of backgrounds?

Conduct deaf awareness training

It's important for all workers to become more aware of the types of deafness, communication barriers, and how to improve their communication skills. Training will also provide them with increased knowledge and understanding to create a better working environment, one that is inclusive of deaf people. This can also help improve staff morale, loyalty, productivity or customer service.

Key Takeaways

As companies make it a priority to accommodate workplaces for deaf people, they tap into a valuable previously underserved population. Everyone organisations intentionally create an inclusive workforce, everyone benefits when deaf people work. The data proves it: when companies offer inclusive working environments for employees with disabilities, as shown by Accenture data, they earn an average of 28% higher revenue, 30% greater economic profit margins, and double the net income of their peers.

Jamie Lard, Perkins School for the Blind spokesperson, said, "Everybody's human and wants to participate in work. Whether it's a difference in skin color or a difference in disabilities, everybody wants to be part of the community."

Abstract
Disability is an important and often overlooked component of diversity. Individuals with disabilities bring a rare perspective to science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and medicine (STEMM) because of their unique experiences approaching complex issues related to health and disability, navigating the healthcare system, creatively solving problems unfamiliar to many individuals without disabilities, managing time and resources that are limited by physical or mental constraints, and advocating for themselves and others in the disabled community. Yet, individuals with disabilities are underrepresented in STEMM. Professional organizations can address this underrepresentation by recruiting individuals with disabilities for leadership opportunities, easing financial burdens, providing equal access, fostering peer-mentor groups, and establishing a culture of equity and inclusion spanning all facets of diversity. We are a group of deaf and hard-of-hearing (D/HH) engineers, scientists, and clinicians, most of whom are

active in clinical practice and/or auditory research. We have worked within our professional societies to improve access and inclusion for D/HH individuals and others with disabilities. We describe how different models of disability inform our understanding of disability as a form of diversity. We address heterogeneity within disabled communities, including intersectionality between disability and other forms of diversity. We highlight how the Association for Research in Otolaryngology has supported our efforts to reduce ableism and promote access and inclusion for D/HH individuals. We also discuss future directions and challenges. The tools and approaches discussed here can be applied by other professional organizations to include individuals with all forms of diversity in STEMM.

Keywords: Diversity & Inclusion, disability, hearing loss, professional organisations, peer mentoring
Go to:

INTRODUCTION

A diverse scientific workforce leads to increased creativity and productivity by introducing a wider range of perspectives, experiences, and skill sets (Lindsay et al., 2018; Tilghman et al., 2021). Diversity is conventionally considered in terms of race, ethnicity, country of origin, linguistic background, socioeconomic background, gender, and/or sexual orientation. Despite its high prevalence in society, disability is often overlooked as a form of diversity (Santuzzi and Waltz, 2016; Dennissen et al., 2018; Gould et al., 2021). While the importance of cultural and ethnic diversity is widely acknowledged, it is important to consider the contribution that individuals with disabilities can make in science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and medicine (STEMM) (Bellman et al., 2018). As with other diverse groups, people with disabilities are underrepresented in STEMM (National Science Foundation, National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics, 2021).

Individuals with disabilities offer a unique perspective drawn from their experiences of living with a disability that can guide novel and innovative scientific progress or improve medical care for people with that particular disability. They frequently have extensive experience navigating healthcare settings as patients, utilizing creativity to overcome accessibility challenges, managing limited time and resources, and advocating for themselves and others with disabilities. This experience translates to valuable attributes such as better communication skills, persistence, empathy, planning, creativity, and adaptability (Hewlett, 2017; Accenture, 2018; Kristjansdottir et al., 2018; Lindsay et al., 2018; DeFelice, 2019; Kulkarni, 2020). Individuals with disabilities often know how to use assistive technology to increase their productivity (Hatton, 2014; Kulkarni, 2020), and some types of disability or neurodiversity have common attributes that might be helpful in and of themselves. For example, employees who are Deaf or hard of hearing (D/HH) may be less distracted by background noise and conversations (Hatton, 2014). Businesses who actively recruit and support individuals with disabilities often see higher revenue and better employee retention than businesses that do not (Accenture, 2018; Lindsay et al., 2018).

As defined by the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2007), "Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments in which interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others." Scientists with disabilities face several hurdles to equity and inclusion (Brown, 2016; Brown et al., 2018; Brown and Leigh, 2018; Inckle, 2018; De Picker, 2020). In the context of STEMM education, disability equity refers to justice in the way that people with disabilities are treated, such that they have the same likelihood for educational and career success as individuals who are not disabled. Disability equity also extends to interpersonal relationships, where individuals with disabilities should be treated with the same respect as individuals who are not disabled. Inclusion of individuals with disabilities means giving them physical, social, and financial access to the same opportunities as individuals without disabilities, often through the use of accommodations. Physical access refers to whether a person with a disability can enter, move around in, and function in a physical space and whether they are able to interact with physical materials (e.g., posters, lab equipment). For D/HH individuals, physical access can be facilitated by using microphones, providing services like captioning, cued language transliteration, or sign language interpretation, and by providing quiet environments for conversations. Social access refers to being able to attend and participate in the informal social interactions (e.g., conversations, dinners, social hours) that can lead to research collaborations, employment, and leadership opportunities. Social access is often a challenge for D/HH individuals who

may be unable to hear in noisy conference halls or restaurants, or who may be exhausted from trying to hear at a conference and thus unable to attend evening events. Finally, financial considerations can limit both physical and social access. Many individuals with disabilities expend significant financial resources on health care and assistive technology. For these reasons, they sometimes cannot afford conference registration fees, travel costs, or educational expenses. Many interactions that are critical to career success occur at professional organizations' academic or scientific conferences. Given the key role professional organizations play in nurturing scientists and facilitating career growth for trainees, we believe these organizations can foster diversity by supporting efforts for recruiting and supporting individuals of diverse backgrounds, including those with disabilities. Indeed, there has been recent interest in how scientific conferences can be more inclusive (Oswald and Ostojic, 2020; Tzovara et al., 2021). We propose five pillars (see Figure 1) that organizations can use to better support their diverse members: 1) fostering peer-mentor groups, 2) proactively providing equal access, 3) easing financial burdens, 4) recruiting for leadership positions, and 5) establishing a culture of inclusion and equity. By adopting these pillars, professional organizations can lead by example, familiarizing their members with equitable treatment and inclusion of individuals with disabilities and those from other diverse backgrounds.

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FIGURE 1 |
The five pillars that Professional and Scientific Organizations can use to support equity and inclusion for scientists with disabilities. The Association for Research in Otolaryngology (ARO) has implemented these building blocks which have been successful in supporting their deaf and hard-of-hearing (D/HH) members.

We are a group of more than 110 deaf and hard-of-hearing (D/HH) engineers, scientists, and clinicians, most of whom are active in clinical practice and/or auditory research (Adler et al., 2017). Our network was initially formed in 1992 at a professional society meeting for the Association for Research in Otolaryngology (ARO) and has continued to grow based on shared experiences at those meetings and in other STEMM environments. Typically, our group makes up 1% or less of attendees at professional conference meetings. Diversity networks such as ours have the potential to promote equity and inclusion if they directly address systemic inequalities in organizations, in addition to advancing career development and building community (Dennissen et al., 2018). We have worked with the organizational leadership of various professional societies to implement successful, practical strategies for improving accommodations, raising awareness, and promoting academic, research, and career development opportunities for diverse trainees. We discuss how one organization, ARO, has fostered a more inclusive and equitable environment for researchers with disabilities and provide five guidelines for other scientific or professional organizations to consider.

Go to:
MODELS OF DISABILITY

Our peer mentorship network for D/HH individuals endorses a biopsychosocial view of hearing loss (defined below) that incorporates medical and social models of disability. While these disability models are not mutually exclusive, each model has distinct approaches to disability.

Medical models of disability address the physical differences associated with specific diagnoses and focus on preventing, curing, remediating, or accommodating the physical underpinnings of a given disability (Pelka, 2012). For D/HH individuals, this might involve genetic counseling about hereditary hearing loss, treatments to preserve or restore inner ear function, auditory rehabilitation through the use of hearing devices (e.g., hearing aids, cochlear implants), and promoting the individual use of assistive technology such as remote microphone technology and smartphone apps to provide automatic speech recognition and transcription. As scientists, engineers, and clinicians who study hearing and live with hearing loss, much of our academic labor falls into this category.

Social models of disability assert that some of the issues experienced by individuals with disabilities arise

from the presence of societal or environmental barriers (Samaha, 2007). For deafness and hearing loss, addressing these barriers might include installing amplification systems that are compatible with hearing aids and cochlear implants, providing real-time captioning for all lectures and meetings by default, and providing interpreting and transliteration services (e.g., sign language interpreters, cued language transliterators, oral transliterators). Proponents of social models of disability often feel the language used to write and talk about disability should use “person-first language” (e.g., researchers with disabilities). This approach is meant to emphasize the personhood of individuals with disabilities and to avoid defining individuals and groups based only on their disability (Dunn and Andrews, 2015).

One type of social model, the diversity model, acknowledges that society and the environment can be inaccessible and exclusionary and also argue that people with disabilities form an important cultural group that contribute to society through their identity as disabled people (Andrews, 2020). This type of model recognizes that disabled people are culturally valuable because of their experiences of living with disability, and not because they are able to “overcome”—or succeed in spite of—their disability. For example, extensive advocacy by the D/HH community during the 1960s through 1980s led to ubiquitous captioning of movies and television broadcast shows. Today, the majority of viewers who now use captioning for their own benefit do not have a hearing loss (Ofcom, 2006).

The diversity model perspective has long been held by the Deaf community (commonly designated by the capital “D” to indicate that it is specific cultural group differentiated from the broader D/HH community) who view hearing loss as a key part of their personal identity and often use sign language as a primary form of communication (Padden and Humphries, 1988). More broadly, disability culture includes individuals with any and all disabilities and encompasses values, arts, and political stances in addition to experiences of shared discrimination and prejudice (see Andrews, 2020; Mackelprang and Salsgiver, 2016; or Brown, 2002, for reviews). For example, the American Deaf community has developed poetry and storytelling techniques that leverage linguistic features unique to American Sign Language (Bahan, 2006; Sutton-Spence and de Quadros, 2014).

Diversity models of disability contributed to the rise of the field of critical disability studies, which focuses on how different diverse identities can intersect with disabilities and draws parallels between the disability rights movements and other civil rights movements (Andrews et al., 2019; Ginsberg and Rapp, 2017). This field has led to our current understanding of ableism, defined as the conscious or unconscious prejudice and discrimination towards disabled people (Andrews, 2020). Ableism takes many forms and can be harmful regardless of whether it stems from ignorance, negative attitudes such as viewing disabled people as burdensome or vulnerable, or from attitudes which on the surface seem more positive, such as viewing disabled people as inspirational or heroic (Andrews, 2020). For example, media profiles of successful disabled individuals in academia seldom acknowledge that the individual’s disability can be an asset and not just something to “overcome” (e.g., Terry, 2019). Often, these narratives either ignore the challenges associated with disability entirely or assert that a scientist with a disability is noteworthy because they succeeded in spite of their disability. Ideally, these profiles would mention the challenges of being disabled and also include information on how their disability helped them to be more successful or a better scientist. Further, inspirational videos and articles of deaf children’s reactions when their cochlear implant is first activated may objectify them and fail to provide adequate background regarding realistic benefits of the device and remaining challenges post-implantation.

Proponents of diversity models and the field of disability studies often advocate for the use “identity-first language” (e.g., D/HH scientists) which enables disabled individuals to express belonging and pride as members of a disabled community and to define what it means to be disabled instead of letting it be defined by negative stereotypes (Dunn and Andrews, 2015). The American Psychological Association (2020) states that both person-first and identity-first language are appropriate, and that authors should consider the preferences of the people who are being written about. In this article, we have elected to use person-first language when referring to disabilities in general (e.g., individuals with disabilities) and identity-first language when discussing the disabled community to which we belong (e.g., D/HH individuals).

Biopsychosocial models integrate aspects of individual, social, and diversity models of disability. Engel (1977) originally proposed a biopsychosocial model as a way of addressing an overreliance on a medical model in psychiatry, which ignored the “social, psychological, and behavioral dimensions of illness.” Since that time, the model has been expanded and updated to apply to many areas of health, illness, and disability (Wade and Halligan, 2017). It was used as the basis for the World Health Organization’s International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health (ICF), a framework for measuring individual- and population-level health and disability in 2001 (World Health Organization, 2001; Kostanjsek, 2010). At the time, the ICF was seen as progressive, because it included not only the biological underpinnings that give rise to disability (medical model), but also considered that the environment, society, and relationships can exacerbate or ameliorate disability (social model) and indicated that personal factors can also have a major impact on disability (diversity model). While personal factors remain underspecified in the ICF model, these factors could potentially include income, age, educational qualifications, and racial, gender, or LGBTQIA+ identity (WHO, 2011; Shaw et al., 2012; Nakkeeran and Nakkeeran, 2018).

The biopsychosocial model has the potential to be transformative because it acknowledges that there are limitations to our ability to address hearing loss and other disabilities through medicine. By combining medical, societal (i.e., environmental), and diversity considerations we can maximize opportunities for the success of disabled individuals. For example, combining cochlear implants (medical) with accommodations such as closed captioning and training of colleagues/teachers on how to facilitate communication (social) as well as introducing the disabled individual to other disabled peers (diversity) has a higher likelihood of success than any of these strategies in isolation.

Go to:

DIVERSITY AND INTERSECTIONALITY

Hearing loss ranges from mild to profound. For example, an individual with mild hearing loss may experience difficulty understanding speech in noisy environments, whereas an individual with profound hearing loss may have little to no functional hearing. Communication modalities found within the hearing loss community can include audio-visual, where speechreading is combined with residual hearing, and visualonly, such as sign language and Cued Speech. The diversity of hearing loss etiologies and communication modes means the hearing loss community is heterogeneous and accessibility strategies for a particular individual (i.e., providing assistive listening devices) may not work for another individual.

Differences in the wording of questions across surveys makes it difficult to estimate the true prevalence of hearing loss (Mitchell, 2006). Nevertheless, rough estimates suggest that approximately 15% of American adults report some trouble with hearing (Blackwell et al., 2012). Global data indicate that 6–18% of the world’s population live with some form of hearing loss (Olusanya et al., 2019). For comparison, these numbers are similar to the numbers for diabetes, which affects 13% of American adults (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020) and 9.3% of adults across the globe (International Diabetes Federation, 2019). Given its high prevalence, it is not surprising that the hearing loss community is inherently diverse. Hearing loss can occur in any individual regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, age, or other cultural background. This diversity can contribute to large disparities in terms of rehabilitative outcomes achieved by people with hearing loss. For instance, a child with hearing loss born into an affluent family may have better hearing outcomes due to better parental follow-up from newborn hearing screenings, early intervention such as speech therapy, and earlier access to hearing aids, cochlear implants, or assistive listening devices. A child born into a family of low socioeconomic status might not have access to the same resources (Holte et al., 2012; Ching et al., 2013).

There are strong parallels in the history and consequences of discrimination between individuals with hearing loss and other marginalized communities. Strategies developed to recruit and support members of the D/HH community in STEMM fields can serve as a template for efforts to recruit and support members of other historically disadvantaged or otherwise marginalized communities. The approach presented below is targeted towards D/HH individuals but can easily be adapted for the specific needs of other marginalized groups.

Go to:

PROMOTING DIVERSITY

The Association for Research in Otolaryngology (ARO) is a scientific organization focused on hearing and balance research that was founded in 1973. In 1992, D/HH attendees at the ARO Midwinter Meeting formed an informal networking group dedicated to increasing the representation of D/HH individuals in hearing research. This group has grown to more than 110 members globally and has encouraged ARO to develop five pillars that support diversity and inclusion among their members (see Figure 1). These pillars are: 1) fostering peer-mentor groups, 2) proactively providing equal access, 3) easing financial burdens, 4) recruiting for leadership positions, and 5) establishing a culture of inclusion and equity. ARO is a model organization that has successfully implemented practices targeting all five pillars. Below, we provide examples for each that can be used as a framework for other STEMM professional and scientific organizations.

Fostering Peer-Mentor Groups

Informal interactions between marginalized peers have been shown to promote academic and social growth in higher education settings (Gurin et al., 2002; Tienda, 2013). Diversity networks have the potential to advance D/HH individuals in STEMM who are vastly underrepresented (0.13–0.19%) compared to the general population (11–15.3%; National Science Foundation, National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics, 2021). Over the last 30 years, D/HH members and attendees of conferences relating to audiology, otolaryngology, and hearing science have established a distributed academic peer-mentorship network (Adler et al., 2017) to address this disparity. This peer-mentorship network is known as “Hearing Impaired members of ARO” (HI-ARO) due to its founding at an ARO meeting, though the group has expanded to include researchers and clinicians who are involved in hearing science but do not attend ARO meetings. HI-ARO has successfully recruited and retained D/HH scientists and clinicians, growing from three members in 1992 to more than 110 members in 2021. Unlike traditional mentoring, in which senior colleagues mentor junior colleagues in similar positions, peer mentorship refers to formal or informal mentoring among individuals who may be professional equals and/or have different types of jobs (Holbeche, 1996). Peer mentorship can be a valuable tool for underrepresented communities (Cree-Green et al., 2020; Williams et al., 2020) and individuals with disabilities (Hibbard et al., 2002; Thompson et al., 2020; Veith et al., 2006, for a review see: Hayes and Balcazar, 2008). Peer mentorship in our group is informal, occurring at group gatherings at professional society meetings (HI-ARO members comprised 1% of total ARO meeting attendees in 2020, or 18 out of 1,798 attendees) and throughout the year via small personal meetings, email, Facebook (@deafearscience), Twitter (@earscience) and our website (www.deafearscientists.org). Most of the mentorship and interactions occur via email, which is ideal for a global group of individuals who often find written communication to be preferable to speaking and listening in a large group.

HI-ARO includes researchers at all career stages and STEMM disciplines, from trainees to senior scientists, medical students to clinicians, as well as audiologists and other leaders in healthcare and industry. HI-ARO members are highly diverse, spanning race, gender, nationality, socioeconomic status, religion, and disability (see Figure 2 for a map of current members’ locations worldwide). Members have a wide range of unilateral and/or bilateral hearing loss ranging from mild to profound with various etiologies. They use different communication modalities including oral, Cued Speech, and sign language. They may or may not use hearing devices and other augmentative technology. The rich diversity of HI-ARO has been instrumental in cultivating invaluable networking opportunities for D/HH trainees that provide support and guidance from peers and senior members, which is critical to personal and professional success. The diversity within the group has required the members to develop strategies that work equally well for all members, regardless of their mode of disability. For example, despite the large range of communication modalities, captioning was selected as the default method of access that is always provided at conferences. If individuals need other accommodations, such as a cued language transliterator, oral transliterator, or sign language interpreter, these can be requested separately.

FIGURE 2 |
HI-ARO is a diverse group with deaf and hard-of-hearing (D/HH) members from all around the globe. Each dot represents a city that has at least one member of HI-ARO. The dot size is scaled according to the number of members at that location.

Proactively Providing Equal Access

For scientists, engineers, and other researchers, attending national conferences is important for career advancement. It is at conferences that researchers learn about the work of others, present their own preliminary findings to the scientific community, and network for access to opportunities. However, effective communication can be challenging for attendees due to noisy conference halls, reverberant lecture halls, and suboptimal or inconsistent use of microphones (Atcherson and Yoder, 2002). For D/HH individuals in particular, these challenges can limit the benefits of attending conferences. Frequently, the D/HH attendee needs to personally contact, advocate for, or even explain their disability to conference organizers as they seek accommodations. Often the attendee needs to decide, well in advance of the meeting, what their exact schedule will be so accommodations can be arranged. Sometimes they must find strategies to facilitate communication on their own by carefully choosing listening locations, or using smart phone apps. This creates additional work and stress for D/HH individuals. Beginning 20 years ago, ARO shifted from a retroactive approach (i.e., provided on request) to a proactive one where all podium sessions are automatically captioned regardless of whether accommodations were requested. This has not only benefited D/HH attendees but also attendees without hearing loss, especially for non-native English attendees and those who are fatigued after several hours of listening to podium presentations.

In recent years, ARO leaders created an accessibility committee made up of D/HH trainees and faculty to further improve accommodations. This has led to expanding captioning to small group meetings and workshops. Strategies for captioning poster sessions with automatic speech recognition apps and incorporating accommodations that are inclusive of other disabilities, such as color blindness, are being pursued. The widespread prevalence of captioning at ARO has provided D/HH attendees the ability to decide at the last minute what presentations they would like to see without having to worry about whether they would be able to follow the discussion. ARO is currently working on addressing acoustic issues in noisy poster halls by reducing the number of posters in a single room and spacing the posters farther out.

It should be noted that some individuals may need additional accommodations (such as a cued language transliterator or sign language interpreter). The registration form ARO uses has a specific field where registrants can describe the accommodations they need. ARO's management company will then reach out to the individual to set up the necessary arrangements.

Of particular relevance to many professional societies that host meetings within the United States is the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA, 1990). The ADA prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities and requires that businesses open to the public, including nonprofit organizations, ensure that people with disabilities have equal access to all that they offer. The ADA typically applies to professional society meetings as they are open to the public (i.e., non-members can attend if they pay a registration fee) and are often partially funded by federal grants. Indeed, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) R13 and U13 funding mechanisms require that the proposal describe strategies for "involving the appropriate representation of women, minorities, and persons with disabilities in the planning and implementation of, and participation in, the proposed conference."

While the ADA requires equal access for these meetings, there is a difference between the professional society complying with the letter of the law, which places tremendous burden on the disabled individual to advocate for themselves and seek services and being proactive about reaching out to disabled attendees and securing accommodations for them. By being proactive about accommodations, professional societies can nurture and support diversity within their communities while avoiding potential conflicts between disabled individuals and conference management.

The optimal approach may vary from organization to organization. For example, ARO is aware that they have approximately 20 D/HH members from our group attending the annual meeting, along with an

unknown number of attendees who may not wish to disclose their hearing difficulties. Thus, the proactive approach for ARO is to automatically arrange for captioning of podium talks, ensure assistive listening devices are available and set up the conference facilities with the goal of improving acoustics. During the registration process, ARO captures information about additional access services that may be required. For other organizations who may feel they do not have a critical mass of D/HH attendees, they can still be proactive by including questions in the registration form to identify anyone who might need special support services. Inclusive practices such as captions and designing the conference with acoustics in mind benefit some members with age-related hearing loss, auditory processing difficulties, or other listening challenges (e.g., listening in a non-native language) but who do not self-identify as D/HH. Finally, being proactive can greatly increase the likelihood of increasing diversity in the organization by encouraging future participation of marginalized individuals.

Easing Financial Burdens

Increasing access to opportunities for diverse trainees with additional avenues for financial support is essential for cultivating personal and professional career success (Stevens et al., 2021). Many scientific and professional STEMM organizations, including ARO, have travel awards for trainees to attend conferences. For over a decade, the ARO Diversity Committee has used hearing loss status, and other disabilities, as an additional evaluation parameter for the Diversity Travel Award. This has since enabled D/HH trainees to receive financial support to attend conferences, furthering their scientific and professional growth and promoting equity for ARO trainees with disabilities.

Recruiting for Leadership Positions

The organizational committees of scientific and professional organizations provide an opportunity for trainees, faculty, and other members to take leadership roles within the organization. At ARO, D/HH trainees and faculty have been recruited to multiple committees, including Council, student-postdoc leadership committees, and those that target diversity and accessibility initiatives. For scientific organizations to practice true inclusion and equity, diverse members need to be in organizational and leadership positions. Diverse perspectives at the senior level can yield innovative approaches to drive the organization forward and encourage constructive changes that advance equitable principles. These experiences allow for D/HH individuals to gain the confidence to seek similar leadership roles at their home institutions.

Establishing a Culture of Inclusion and Equity

The five pillars described above have focused on how scientific organizations can support their diverse members. However, support should also come from other members. Here, organizations have an opportunity to provide tools for all members to learn from diverse perspectives so that they can reflect, grow, and start to advance and advocate for inclusion and equity in their professional and personal lives. ARO has hosted several events aimed at increasing awareness of diverse perspectives, addressing personal biases, and providing tools that help mitigate negative situations for marginalized attendees. These include events where notable individuals with hearing loss share their experiences, roundtable discussions for Women and Allies, networking events, and hiring outside facilitators to provide bystander training for all ARO members. From the point of view of scientific organizations, it can be difficult to assess whether progress has been made in establishing a culture of inclusion and equity. One way organizations can track progress is through anonymous surveys, where members can report whether they feel that the organization has or has not been successful in fostering inclusivity, identify areas of improvement, or voice concern if exclusionary conduct has occurred. This gives the organization an opportunity to improve in areas that are lacking, intervene if there is a problematic situation/person, and track progress of efforts over time. In addition, organizations can track the number of diverse individuals on society committees and leadership roles to ensure that representation is maintained and/or exceeded over time. It should be noted that in other fields, such as deaf education, certain conferences place great emphasis on accessibility. For example, D/HH individuals are included in the meeting planning and keynote presenters are chosen who are themselves D/HH. ARO is working to emulate lessons learned at these conferences by setting up an accessibility committee consisting of D/HH and other disabled individuals. In the past year, greater emphasis has been placed on inviting individuals with hearing loss, such as a deaf comedienne, to present at AROorganized events.

Broader Impact

Over the last several years, an increasing number of D/HH clinicians and scientists have been presenting at auditory research conferences via posters and podium talks highlighting the need for expanded accessibility. Even within the field of hearing science and related clinical fields, some organizations still resist the need to accommodate a growing number of attendees with hearing loss. Nevertheless, the last decade has seen captioning at the biannual Conference for Implantable Auditory Prostheses (CIAP), the yearly American Cochlear Implant Alliance (ACIA) conference, the American Auditory Society annual conference, and the CI CRASH Midwest MiniConference on Cochlear Implants (hosted by University of Wisconsin-Madison). After three D/HH presenters had trouble understanding and answering questions at a CIAP meeting in the mid-2000s, one attendee declared that CIAP and related conferences should provide captioning. Since then, CIAP has received NIH funding for captioning which in 2019 benefited a record number of 13 D/HH attendees. By proactively seeking funding for captioning and providing access to all attendees, including those who are D/HH, these organizations stand out as truly being inclusive.

Our experience illustrates the proclamation from the Disability Rights Movement, “Nothing about us without us.” D/HH scientists and clinicians should strive to be essential stakeholders in organizations that focus on hearing research and audiology so that the perspectives and experiences of D/HH individuals cannot be ignored. Moreover, equitable access in educational and workplace settings, and at conferences, will help establish productive research trajectories and increased diversity in these settings.

For nearly 30 years, HI-ARO has worked with our professional organizations, especially ARO, to implement successful and practical strategies to increase inclusion of its D/HH members. With the guidance of our peer-network group, ARO leadership has continuously improved accommodations and provided essential support for academic, research, and career development success for D/HH members. ARO’s support for equity and diversity has served and may continue to serve as a model for other conferences and professional organizations.

Go to:

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This article has described a highly successful model for promoting representation of D/HH individuals in hearing research. We have found that D/HH individuals have used their early career in hearing research, combined with mentorship from our group, as a stepping stone to other fields of study and medical specialties. This same support needs to be extended to inclusion of other disabilities, such as visual impairment, in their chosen field, and to the inclusion of D/HH individuals in STEMM fields beyond hearing research. Funding opportunities from the National Science Foundation (NSF 21-049, NSF 21-110) and the National Institutes of Health (R13, U13, R25) gives professional societies financial support to implement the five pillars, such as with conference costs (e.g., captioning) and mentoring activities.

The fact that the strong D/HH network arose in the auditory field is not surprising. After all, auditory researchers and clinicians understand communication challenges and many of us have been fortunate to have been mentored by normal hearing individuals who advocated for access within ARO. However, many other scientific societies have unfortunately not yet followed the lead of ARO. To fully realize equal participation of D/HH individuals in STEMM will require administrative champions in the leadership of other societies given the cost of assistive technology. The hearing research field is relatively small, and STEMM will benefit when D/HH individuals have full access to career opportunities in the field of their choice-not limited by the accessibility of the field or others’ perceptions of what would be a “natural” choice based on their disability. Thus, the scientific community needs to come to this realization and do more for D/HH individuals across disciplines.

Professional organizations, including those that are not STEMMfocused, can include individuals with disabilities by inviting them to provide input on policies such as disability accommodations at scientific meetings. The COVID-19 pandemic provided an opportunity to reshape accommodations for those with disability when in-person conferences were shifted to virtual. For a virtual poster, a presentation is often recorded, without background noise, and can easily be captioned. Digital platforms can facilitate

asynchronous text-based research interactions. This mode can be easier for many D/HH individuals and other individuals with disabilities than in-person sessions and conversations in noisy conference halls. Hybrid conferences adopting universal design approaches combined with remote manual correction and formatting of automatic captioning might proactively reduce isolation while still affording these benefits.

Another opportunity for professional organizations to foster diversity is to create mentoring programs for diverse middle school and high school students, including those with disabilities. Many students from historically excluded groups have the potential to succeed in STEMM fields but do not always receive the guidance and support needed to pursue those paths. Having a mentor who has faced similar challenges can bring confidence in learning and self-advocating and provide encouragement and inspiration. Existing models such as AG Bell's Leadership Opportunities for Teens (LOFT), Oregon Health Science University's On Track OHSU! and others (Pluth et al., 2015) provide a framework for adopting similar programs for STEMM outreach.

Our peer-mentorship network of D/HH engineers, scientists, and clinicians is foundational to our success in STEMM. Trainees have successfully transitioned to being leaders in academia, healthcare, and industry, often receiving significant research funding. Through this network we discuss the challenges we face and strategies to overcome difficulties. We also form a cohesive group to advocate for changes in our fields and at professional conferences to address the underrepresentation of individuals with hearing loss in STEMM. We believe that the adoption of this peer-mentorship network model by other underrepresented minority groups, and collaboration among and between peer-mentorship networks and professional societies, will drive changes that will promote diversity and equity in STEMM and other fields.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS
We thank Dr. Monita Chatterjee, Dr. Amanda Lauer, and the ARO council for their helpful comments on the manuscript.

FUNDING

JTR was partially supported by R25 NS107167 from the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke at NIH. PS was partially supported by P20 GM129762 from the National Institute of General Medical Sciences at NIH.

Go to:
Footnotes
Conflict of Interest: Author J-TF was employed by the company Bioglobe GmbH.

The remaining authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Go to:
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Learning sign language quickly can be a rewarding yet challenging process. Sign language is a rich, complex form of communication that, like any language, requires patience, practice, and dedication. Whether you're learning for personal, professional, or community reasons, the following comprehensive guide offers practical tips and strategies to help you accelerate your learning process.

1. **Start with the Basics: Finger Spelling**
- **Learn the Alphabet First:** One of the best ways to start learning sign language is by mastering the alphabet through finger spelling. Finger spelling involves using hand signs to represent each letter of the alphabet. This is often the first thing beginners learn because it allows for spelling out words that you may not know the sign for.
- **Practice Daily:** Finger spelling should be practiced daily. Start by spelling your name, then try spelling other common words, names of friends, and objects around you. Gradually build your speed and accuracy.
- **Recognizing Spelled Words:** Equally important to signing is being able to understand finger spelling when others use it. You can practice this skill by watching videos of people finger spelling or by using apps that teach recognition.

2. **Immerse Yourself in the Language**
- **Watch Videos and Tutorials:** There are many online resources, such as YouTube channels, that provide free lessons and tutorials on sign language. Watching native signers will help you learn proper hand shapes, movements, and facial expressions.
- **Use Sign Language Apps:** There are apps specifically designed to teach sign language, such as "The ASL App" for American Sign Language (ASL) or "Sign BSL" for British Sign Language (BSL). These apps often come with quizzes, video tutorials, and vocabulary lists.
- **Attend Deaf Events:** Immersing yourself in an environment where sign language is the primary form of communication will force you to use the language more quickly and frequently. Attending Deaf community events, workshops, or social gatherings will help you practice with fluent signers and see the language in action.

3. **Build Your Vocabulary**

- **Start with High-Frequency Words:** Just as with spoken languages, certain words in sign language are used more frequently than others. Focus on learning common words and phrases that will help you engage in everyday conversations.
- **Categorize Words for Easier Learning:** Group words into categories such as family, emotions, animals, food, or transportation. This will make it easier to remember related signs. For instance, learning signs for "mother," "father," "brother," and "sister" together can reinforce memory.
- **Use Flashcards:** Flashcards can be a highly effective way to memorize signs. Create flashcards with a picture or description of the word on one side and the corresponding sign on the other. You can practice these during short breaks or study sessions.
- **Set Daily or Weekly Vocabulary Goals:** Aim to learn a set number of new signs each day or week, depending on your availability. Start with 5 to 10 words per day, and gradually increase as you become more confident.

4. **Focus on Facial Expressions and Body Language**
- **Understand the Importance of Non-Manual Signals:** In sign language, facial expressions and body movements are as important as hand signs. These non-manual signals convey tone, emotion, and intensity. For instance, the same hand sign might mean different things depending on the facial expression accompanying it.
- **Practice Expressing Emotions with Your Face:** Practice using your facial expressions to convey emotions such as happiness, sadness, surprise, or confusion. For example, raising your eyebrows while asking a question in sign language is a common facial expression.
- **Watch and Mimic Native Signers:** Pay attention to how fluent signers use their entire bodies to communicate, including their head, shoulders, and eyebrows. Practice mirroring their movements to develop a more natural, fluent signing style.

5. **Learn Through Real-Life Practice**
- **Find a Practice Partner:** One of the best ways to learn any language is through real conversation. Find someone who is also learning sign language, or a fluent signer, and practice with them. Regular interaction will help reinforce what you've learned.
- **Use Video Chat Services for Practice:** If you can’t meet with someone in person, consider using video chat platforms to practice. You can connect with other learners or join online sign language meetups.
- **Teach Others What You Learn:** Teaching is one of the best ways to solidify knowledge. If you have friends or family interested in sign language, practice by teaching them what you’ve learned. This will not only help reinforce your memory but also improve your confidence.

6. **Immerse Yourself in Deaf Culture**
- **Learn About the Deaf Community:** Sign language is closely tied to Deaf culture. Understanding the values, norms, and history of the Deaf community will provide context and deepen your understanding of the language. For instance, you’ll learn that maintaining eye contact is crucial in conversations, as it indicates you’re actively listening.
- **Read Books or Watch Documentaries:** There are several books and documentaries about Deaf culture and sign language. These resources can give you insights into the experiences of deaf individuals and their communication needs.
- **Follow Deaf Creators on Social Media:** Many deaf influencers share sign language lessons, stories, and cultural insights on platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. Following these creators will expose you to the language daily and provide context for how signs are used in everyday life.

7. **Focus on Sentence Structure**
- **Learn Sign Language Grammar:** Sign language grammar is different from spoken languages. For example, in ASL, the typical sentence structure follows a "topic-comment" format. Instead of saying "I am going to the store," you would sign something closer to "Store, I go."
- **Practice Building Simple Sentences:** Start by learning how to structure simple sentences such as "I am hungry" or "Where is the bathroom?" Gradually build on this by adding adjectives, questions, and more complex phrases.

- **Understand Time Indicators:** Sign language often indicates time (past, present, future) at the beginning of the sentence. For example, "Yesterday, I go store" would convey "I went to the store yesterday." Practicing these grammar rules will help you sound more natural.

8. **Use Mnemonic Devices**
- **Create Visual Associations:** Mnemonics are a powerful tool for memorizing signs. For example, the sign for "apple" in ASL is made by twisting your knuckle into your cheek, mimicking the motion of eating an apple.
- **Develop Your Own Memory Tricks:** Create associations between the sign and the concept. For example, the sign for "teacher" in ASL looks like someone pulling knowledge from their head and giving it to others. This visual association makes it easier to remember.
- **Group Similar Signs Together:** Some signs have subtle differences (e.g., signs for "mother" and "father" in ASL are similar but placed in different locations). Grouping these signs together and practicing their differences will help you avoid confusion.

9. **Consistency is Key**
- **Practice Daily:** Like any other language, consistency is critical when learning sign language. Even if it's just for 15-20 minutes a day, daily practice will help you retain what you've learned.
- **Keep a Sign Language Journal:** Maintain a journal where you note down new signs you learn each day. Review your notes regularly to reinforce the signs in your memory.
- **Use a Sign Language Learning App:** Many apps, such as "SignSchool" or "ASL Bloom," allow you to practice daily with reminders, quizzes, and practice exercises.

10. **Use Technology to Aid Learning**
- **Use Sign Language Recognition Software:** There are apps that use AI to recognize your signs and provide feedback on whether you're signing correctly. This is a great way to practice on your own and ensure that your signs are accurate.
- **Watch Sign Language Movies and Shows:** Some streaming platforms offer content in sign language or have sign language interpreters for certain shows. Watching these programs can immerse you in the language and give you real-life examples of how sign language is used.
- **Engage in Sign Language Communities Online:** Many forums and communities (like Reddit's sign language forums or Facebook groups) allow learners to ask questions, share experiences, and practice together.

11. **Stay Motivated**
- **Set Achievable Goals:** Break down your learning into smaller, manageable goals. For example, aim to learn 50 signs in your first month, or master finger spelling by a certain date.
- **Track Your Progress:** Use a sign language app or journal to track the signs and phrases you've learned. This will help you stay motivated and see how far you've come.
- **Celebrate Milestones:** Every time you reach a milestone, such as being able to hold a basic conversation, celebrate your achievement. This will keep you motivated to continue learning.

12. **Stay Open to Making Mistakes**
- **Don't Be Afraid to Make Mistakes:** Learning a new language involves making mistakes. Instead of being discouraged, see each mistake as an opportunity to improve.
- **Ask for Feedback:** If you're practicing with someone fluent in sign language, ask for feedback on your signs. Constructive criticism will help you correct errors and improve your skills faster.

13. **Understand Regional Variations**
- **Be Aware of Regional Differences:** Just like spoken languages, sign languages have regional dialects. For instance, American Sign Language (ASL) and British Sign Language (BSL) are quite different, even though both countries speak English. If you're planning to use sign language in a specific region or country, make sure you're learning the appropriate dialect.

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14. **Incorporate Sign Language Into Your Daily Life**
   - **Label Objects Around Your Home:** Place labels on common objects around your house with their corresponding sign. This will help you remember the signs and practice them every day as you interact with these items.
   - **Think in Sign Language:** Just as you might try to think in a new spoken language, practice thinking in sign language. This mental practice will help reinforce your vocabulary and improve your fluency over time.
   - **Sign Along to Songs:** If you enjoy music, try signing along to the lyrics of your favorite songs. Many songs have been translated into sign language, and this can be a fun way to practice.

15. **Consider Taking a Formal Course**
   - **Enroll in a Sign Language Class:** If you're serious about learning sign language quickly, consider taking a formal class. This could be through a local college, university, or online platform. A structured course can provide discipline, guidance, and a community of fellow learners.
   - **Hire a Tutor:** If you prefer one-on-one learning, you might want to consider hiring a tutor. A sign language tutor can provide personalized feedback, help you progress faster, and tailor lessons to your learning style.

Conclusion:
Learning sign language quickly is possible with dedication, consistency, and the right strategies. By combining daily practice, immersion, and the use of modern technology, you can accelerate your learning process and become conversational in sign language sooner than you might expect. Remember that, like any language, sign language requires time and effort, but with the tips outlined in this guide, you're well on your way to becoming fluent.

Practicing Finger Spelling Effectively: A Comprehensive Guide

Finger spelling is a crucial component of many sign languages, including American Sign Language (ASL) and British Sign Language (BSL). It allows you to spell out names, unfamiliar words, or words for which there is no specific sign. If you want to master finger spelling, you'll need a variety of methods and consistent practice to become proficient. This guide will cover detailed tips, techniques, and strategies for effectively practicing finger spelling.

1. **Start with the Basics: Master the Alphabet**
Before diving into more advanced strategies, ensure that you have memorized the handshapes for each letter of the alphabet. Finger spelling requires fluidity and comfort with these handshapes, so start by learning the alphabet thoroughly.

- **Visualize Each Handshape:** When first learning finger spelling, it's helpful to spend time visualizing each letter and how your hand should look. Focus on positioning your fingers correctly and maintaining a consistent shape.

- **Use a Mirror:** Practicing in front of a mirror helps you understand how each sign looks from the perspective of someone else. Watch yourself as you sign each letter, making sure your handshapes are clear and distinct. This method also helps identify and correct any bad habits you may develop early on.

- **Practice in Order:** Start by practicing the alphabet in order, A through Z. At first, go slowly and focus on making each sign correctly. After you become more comfortable, try to increase your speed gradually without losing accuracy.

- **Practice Out of Order:** Once you're comfortable with the alphabet, try finger spelling the letters out of order. This will ensure you're not simply memorizing the sequence but instead recalling each letter individually.

2. **Break It Down: Focus on Hand Shapes**
Each letter in the alphabet has a unique hand shape, and becoming proficient at finger spelling requires a focus on precision. To do this effectively:

- **Group Similar Signs Together:** Certain letters have similar hand shapes or movements. For example, in ASL, the letters "D" and "F" share some similarities in finger positioning. Group these together and practice them back to back so that you can recognize the subtle differences.

- **Pay Attention to Symmetry:** Some letters have symmetrical hand shapes, like "A" and "S." Being mindful of these helps reinforce muscle memory and make finger spelling more intuitive.

- **Review Problematic Letters:** Some hand shapes can be particularly tricky, especially for beginners. Commonly challenging letters include "M," "N," and "T" in ASL, where the thumb's position varies slightly. Identify which letters you struggle with and give them extra attention until they feel as natural as the others.

3. **Speed and Fluency**
Once you have the shapes down, it's time to work on speed and fluidity. This doesn’t mean sacrificing accuracy, but being able to finger spell quickly is important for maintaining natural conversations in sign language.

- **Time Yourself:** Set a timer for 30 seconds to one minute and see how many letters you can finger spell correctly in that time frame. Keep track of your progress so you can measure improvement over time.

- **Progressive Speed Increase:** As you practice, start with slow and deliberate finger spelling, focusing on clarity and correctness. Gradually increase your speed until you can finger spell entire words fluidly. Start with short words, then work your way to longer and more complex words.

- **Use a Metronome:** Some learners find it helpful to use a metronome set at a comfortable speed to ensure that they don’t go too fast or too slow. Over time, increase the tempo of the metronome as your fluency improves.

- **Smooth Transitions:** One key aspect of fluency is transitioning smoothly between letters. Pay attention to how your hand moves from one letter to the next. For example, moving from "L" to "O" in ASL requires a shift in finger positioning. Practice these transitions until they become natural and fluid.

4. **Practice with Real Words**
Once you've mastered the individual letters, the next step is to practice finger spelling actual words. Start with simple, short words, and work your way up to more complex ones.

- **Use Common Words:** Start with commonly used words that you might encounter in everyday conversations. Words like "cat," "dog," "book," and "food" are simple enough to start with but offer good practice.

- **Focus on Names:** One of the primary uses of finger spelling in sign language is to spell out names, as they often don’t have a specific sign. Practice spelling out your own name, the names of friends, family members, or even famous people.

- **Learn High-Frequency Words:** Many sign language dictionaries provide lists of high-frequency words that are finger spelled often in conversations. Practicing these will give you a strong foundation and prepare you for real-world interactions.

- **Increase Word Length Over Time:** As you get more comfortable, challenge yourself by finger spelling longer words. Try practicing compound words, technical terms, or even words with tricky combinations of

letters to keep your skills sharp.

5. **Use Technology for Support**
There are various online tools and mobile apps designed specifically to help you practice finger spelling. These can be a convenient and fun way to reinforce what you've learned and track your progress.

- **Finger Spelling Apps:** Download apps that are specifically designed for finger spelling practice. Apps like “SignSchool” or “ASL Fingerspelling Practice” allow you to practice spelling words, quiz yourself, and get immediate feedback on your progress.

- **Video Tutorials:** YouTube and other video-sharing platforms have numerous tutorials where native signers demonstrate proper finger spelling. Watching these videos helps you see finger spelling in context and understand how it is used in conversation.

- **Practice with AI and Speech Recognition Tools:** Some apps and software use AI and camera technology to assess your finger spelling and provide feedback. This can help correct your hand shapes and speed up your learning.

6. **Games and Challenges**
Gamifying your practice can make learning more enjoyable and motivating. Whether you play by yourself or with a partner, there are several ways to incorporate games into your routine.

- **Finger Spelling Word Jumbles:** Write down several words on paper, then mix up the letters and try to finger spell the jumbled words. This will challenge your brain and fingers to think quickly.

- **Spelling Bee Challenges:** Just like a traditional spelling bee, have someone give you words to spell out using finger spelling. You can practice alone or with a partner. Try to increase the complexity of the words as you improve.

- **Memory Games:** Try to memorize several words or phrases and then finger spell them without looking at the written words. This can help reinforce both your memory and your finger spelling ability.

7. **Consistency is Key**
Consistency is essential when it comes to mastering finger spelling. The more frequently you practice, the faster you will improve.

- **Set a Schedule:** Set aside dedicated time each day to practice finger spelling. Even just 10-15 minutes of practice daily can lead to significant improvements over time.

- **Incorporate Finger Spelling into Daily Life:** Find ways to incorporate finger spelling into your daily routine. For example, while watching TV, spell out the names of characters or objects you see on the screen. You can also practice spelling things you see around your house, such as furniture, appliances, or food items.

- **Challenge Yourself with New Words:** Always look for new words to practice. It can be tempting to stick to familiar words, but challenging yourself with new and more complex terms will help you improve more quickly.

8. **Develop Finger Dexterity**
Finger spelling requires fine motor skills, and improving your finger dexterity can make the process easier and more fluid.

- **Finger Exercises:** Just like any other skill, finger spelling requires coordination and strength in your hands. Practice exercises like finger stretches, squeezing stress balls, or doing simple finger drills to improve your dexterity and hand strength.

- **Finger Coordination Drills:** You can also practice moving your fingers in quick succession, such as touching each finger to your thumb rapidly. This can improve your speed and accuracy when finger spelling.

9. **Test Yourself Regularly**
It's important to assess your progress over time to ensure that you're improving.

- **Use Timed Quizzes:** Set a timer and see how many words you can finger spell correctly within a set time. Keep track of your results and aim to improve with each practice session.

- **Record Yourself:** Recording yourself while finger spelling allows you to review your practice and check for accuracy. It also helps you see where you might need to improve.

- **Join Online Challenges:** Many online communities and apps offer weekly or monthly challenges for finger spelling practice. Participating in these challenges can motivate you to improve and give you the opportunity to interact with other learners.

10. **Learn Receptive Finger Spelling**
Being able to understand others when they finger spell is just as important as being able to do it yourself. This skill, known as receptive finger spelling, requires sharp visual recognition and quick thinking.

- **Watch Videos of Others Finger Spelling:** Practice by watching videos of native signers finger spelling words. Try to recognize the letters and write down the words as you see them. You can pause or slow down the video if necessary, then gradually work up to real-time speed.

- **Practice with a Partner:** Find someone else who is learning sign language or a fluent signer and take turns finger spelling words to each other. This helps improve both your expressive and receptive skills.

- **Use Flashcards:** You can also create flashcards with finger-spelled words on one side and the written word on the other. Practice recognizing the finger-spelled words and matching them to the correct word.

11. **Stay Motivated and Set Goals**
Like any language learning process, staying

motivated is crucial for success. Set specific goals for your finger spelling practice and celebrate your progress.

- **Track Your Improvement:** Keep a journal or log of your practice sessions, noting down how many words you can finger spell, your speed, and any areas that need improvement. Seeing your progress in writing can be highly motivating.

- **Reward Yourself for Milestones:** Set milestones for your learning, such as spelling a certain number of words or improving your speed by a specific percentage. Reward yourself when you reach these goals to stay motivated.

Conclusion:
Practicing finger spelling effectively requires a mix of techniques, tools, and consistent effort. By focusing on accuracy, speed, fluency, and receptive skills, you can become proficient in finger spelling and integrate it seamlessly into your sign language communication. With the right approach and dedication, you'll be able to finger spell comfortably and quickly, opening the door to more meaningful and fluid communication in sign language.