



# Fingerspelling

***EXPRESSIVE & RECEPTIVE FLUENCY***

AN INSTRUCTIONAL BOOKLET  
FOR THE VIDEO GUIDE BY  
**JOYCE LINDEN GROODE**

***"...at a standing-room-only workshop, participants learned the magic of her 'spell'..."***

S. KAY VINCENT, Director  
Deaf Community Services, San Diego

***"Joyce Groode has magical hands...She conducted a workshop for SCRID, and thanks to her, we can now approach fingerspelling with more confidence."***

VIRGINIA HUGHES and RONI PERLUT  
Southern California Registry  
of Interpreters for the Deaf

***"...an entire course in Fingerspelling in two hours..."***

MEL CARTER, JR.  
Deaf Studies Professor  
California State University, Northridge

***"Wow! Marvelous! Informative, humorous and engaging!"***

PROFESSIONAL INTERPRETER  
British Columbia, Canada

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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This work is dedicated to my parents,  
*Irving and Sylvia Linden*  
who introduced me to another language  
and gave me a lifetime career.

Many people have contributed to the collection of ideas and strategies presented in the Fingerspelling video and this instructional booklet. I owe gratitude to them all, especially to the following people who helped make this 23-year dream a reality:

*Barbara Babbini Brasel* and *Gerilee Gustason*, both of whom shared many ideas during the late 1960s and early 1970s, which improved my own fingerspelling skills and inspired me to teach others the same;

The late *George Attletweed* for early development of slides; and a film at *California State University, Northridge, Summer Sign Institute of 1969*,

*Joe Bretweiser* who showed me “another” way of teaching fingerspelling in 1970;

*Mel Carter* who gave me the opportunity to present my ideas to other interpreters, teachers and colleagues in the National Interpreter Training Consortium in 1976;

*Joe Myklebust* who showed me in 1976 that there was a real need among teachers for media to teach fingerspelling;

*Frank Allen Paul (FAP)* for illustrating one of the manual alphabet charts and for bringing me to DawnSignPress;

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*Participants of fingerspelling classes and workshops* over the past 16 years who shared their creatively spelled words;

And all the people involved in this project: the production technicians and studio staff; *DawnSignPress staff*; consultants: *Larry Fleischer, Mel Carter* and *Ben Bahan*; host *Tom Holcomb*; and editors: *Tina Jo Breindel* and *Judy Coryell*.

Aside from a variety of Manual Alphabet charts and a few booklets, there have been only a small number of published materials in the area of fingerspelling. Some helpful practice films and videos have been produced, but few are commercially available today. In addition, little research has been conducted on the expressive and receptive skills required in producing and processing fingerspelled words.

Sign language students and interpreters often experience frustration in learning to fingerspell clearly and accurately. It is also common to face even more frustration in the development of fluent receptive skills. Ideally, both expressive and receptive fingerspelling skills are developed while learning sign language and interacting with Deaf people.

Even though fingerspelling depicts the English alphabet in the United States, it plays an important role in American Sign Language (ASL). Students learning ASL through conversational interactions are exposed to fingerspelled words, names and loan signs embedded in the context of signed utterances. This is a natural process and is comparable to how children of ASL-using parents acquire fingerspelling. Similar development of fingerspelling skills occurs in other countries using different manual alphabet systems, usually based on the spoken or written system of the particular area or culture.

This author has experienced frustrations similar to students developing fingerspelling skills. Even though she is a hearing child of deaf parents, she did not learn to fingerspell until the age of nine because her parents were educated orally. Due to her interaction with the Deaf community and her professional involvement in the field as a teacher and interpreter, she felt the need to improve her own skills. The material in this booklet and video is the result of that need, and a growing interest in the beauty and challenge of fingerspelling.

Over the years, thanks to members of the Deaf community and other colleagues, I have collected a variety of techniques for teaching fingerspelling and strategies for the student to use in approaching the task of comprehending and producing fingerspelled words. These strategies and suggestions for practice are included in video format to help students understand the processes involved, to establish an appropriate “attitude” toward the task, to develop correct handshapes and fluent production, and to implement practice activities to improve skills.

I am frequently asked why I support working on fingerspelling in isolation since I recommend that fingerspelling be acquired within the context of learning sign language. Some may think of me as advocating a return to the Rochester method.\* This is not my philosophy. I believe that fluency in the use of the manual alphabet cannot be developed in isolation apart from sign language, but instead must be integrated with the language learning process and acquired within the context of words.

Time and commitment are required for developing fluency in both expressive and receptive skills. The only way to speed up this process is to increase the amount of time spent on practice. However, since repeated practice of fingerspelling may be physically stressful and even painful, included in this booklet is a section by Gary Sanderson which offers tips to avoid Repetitive Motion Injury.

Though video is not quite the ideal or natural interactive process to provide an opportunity to learn fingerspelling simultaneously with learning American Sign Language, I believe that there comes a time when students need to focus on improving their fingerspelling skills and utilize techniques which are not usually taught in the classroom setting.

So, warm up your hands, stretch your fingers, and welcome to the world of fingerspelling.

*Joyce Linden Groode*

\* This method of educating deaf students was widely used during the '50s and '60s. Teachers and students were required to speak English and fingerspell each word at the same time.

### The purpose of the accompanying video is to:

- *provide models of appropriate handshapes*
- *suggest expressive practice techniques*
- *provide receptive practice and strategies*
- *identify potential problems*
- *suggest remediation*

The tape provides a foundation for improving comprehension and building production fluency. Information is presented in sign language in a classroom setting, anticipating the kinds of questions that might be asked by learners. Additionally, all information is voiced and closed captioned so the tape is useful to and all information is accessible to hearing parents of deaf children, deafened adults, teachers of deaf students, less experienced signers as well as advanced students.

Although the purpose of the video is not to demonstrate or teach individual sign vocabulary, it does present grammatical aspects of ASL related to fingerspelling. The video does not show the manual alphabet in A-B-C order, even though fingerspelling may represent English vocabulary. The tape does focus on very specific characteristics of fingerspelling, such as double letters, often demonstrated in words isolated from signed contexts for the purpose of providing practice cues. Again, a conversational or classroom setting with live language models is therefore the proper environment in which to learn the alphabet within the context of words.

In addition, students will see in this tape both right and left-handed models presenting variations in the production of certain letters. There are some individual and regional differences that are quite acceptable to most signers. Above all, students must look to members of their local Deaf community for appropriate language models and opportunities to use new skills.

Future tapes in this series may focus on other aspects of fingerspelling so students can have opportunities to expand their understanding of how fingerspelling is used within American Sign Language.

The following pages of the guide include a student self-evaluation and word activities. In this author's experience, participation in word games such as Scrabble and working crossword puzzles in print may enhance students' ability to see patterns in fingerspelled words. Word activities are included in this booklet as a way of reviewing the strategies presented in the video.

The tape opens with an introduction by host Dr. Tom Holcomb followed by seven sections, each focusing on a specific area.

**Section I** presents an overview of a natural approach to fingerspelling.

**Section II** prepares the student to approach fingerspelled words as whole units to develop receptive skills. It also introduces the information in the next section.

**Section III** focuses on the development of clear expressive skills and provides a look at other aspects of fingerspelling such as variations in handshapes.

**Section IV** gives the student an opportunity to practice expressive fingerspelling skills and to increase spelling speed in gradual increments.

**Section V** provides receptive practice with both anticipated vocabulary and specific patterns of English. Examples may be used to build practice strategies to use with friends or family members.

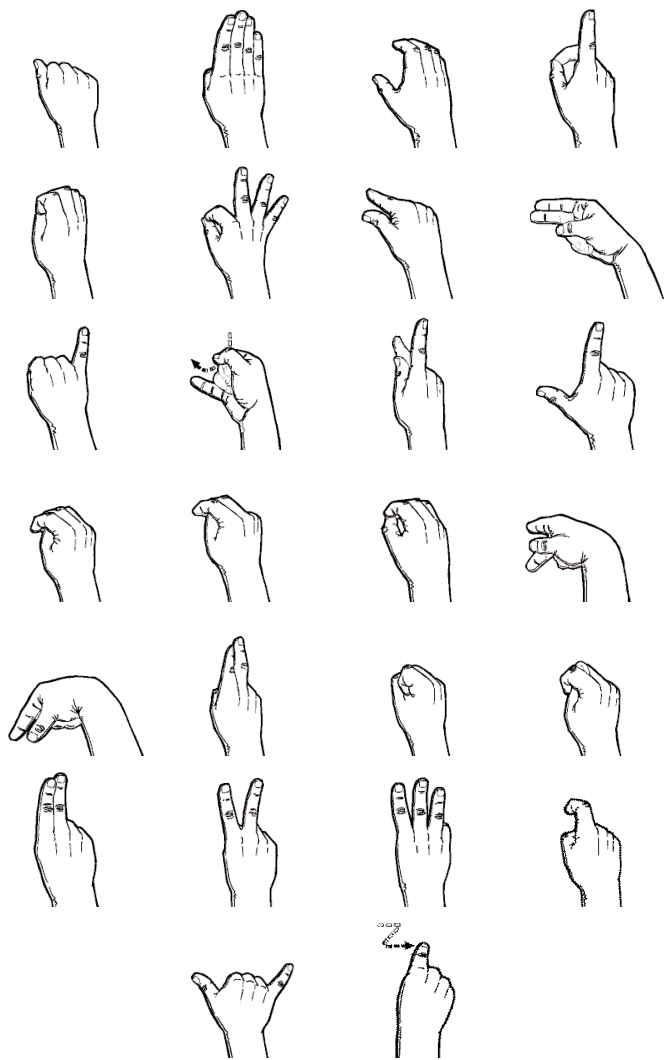
**Section VI** includes background information, explanation and demonstration of loan signs which should prove helpful to students who will be exposed to such lexical items borrowed from English.

And finally, **Section VII** will bring relief from the concentration and drill of previous sections. Here is an opportunity to enjoy creative uses of fingerspelling and to have fun with the manual alphabet.

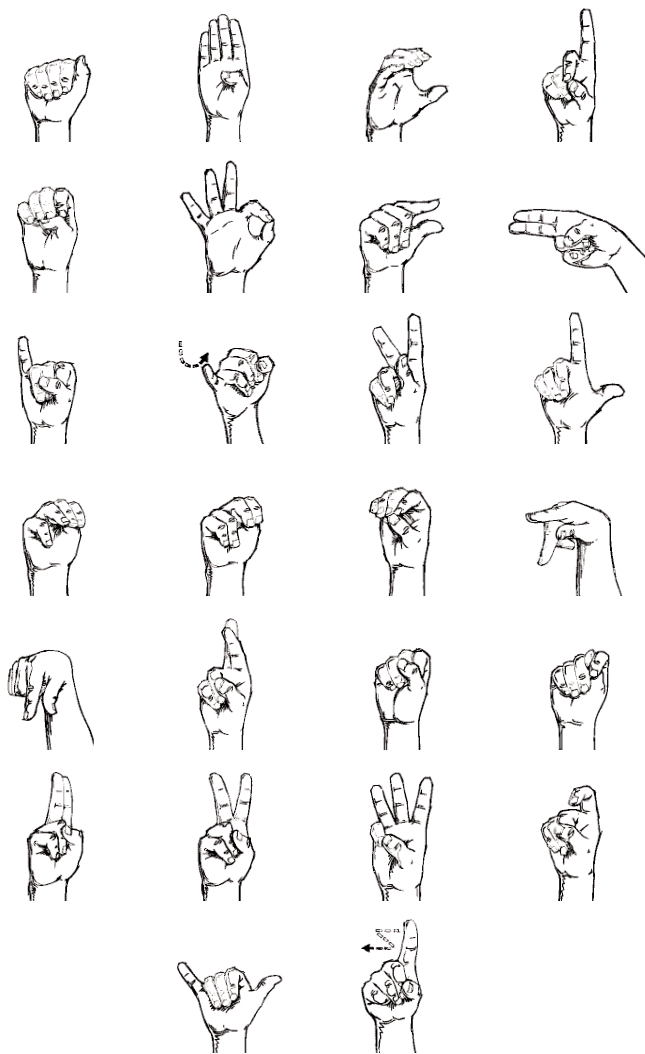
Students may wish to watch the two-hour tape in its entirety; however, this need not be done in one sitting. Section(s) that need more attention can then be reviewed. More experienced signers may choose to view the tape without sound/without closed-captions for more challenging practice in reading fingerspelling within the context of the presentation. However, it is difficult to perceive fingerspelled words clearly in two-dimensional form. Also, since fingerspelling is a communicative act, both a sender and a receiver are required for natural context. Therefore, it is strongly recommended that the student have practice with another signer/speller carry out the suggested strategies presented in the tape.

# MANUAL ALPHABET CHARTS

This is a view of your hand (right-handed signer) as you spell to others. Watch the video for examples of variations. Also, be sure to notice the hand transitions between letters and words, the production of double letters and other aspects of fingerspelling as demonstrated in the video.



This is what you will see when you read the spelling of others. Again, look at the video for examples of variations and for other tips on production of letters in the context of words.



# STUDENT SELF-EVALUATION

To help you focus on the particular areas you wish to develop or improve, rate yourself on the following statements:

OFTEN		SOMETIMES		NEVER
1	2	3	4	5

## FOR EXPRESSIVE SKILLS:

1. I get mixed up on formation of certain letters of the alphabet.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

2. People complain that my fingerspelling is hard to read.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

3. I often stumble or omit letters when I fingerspell.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

4. I spell slowly because I have to think of each letter.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

5. It is not my fingerspelling; I just cannot spell properly!

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

6. My hand gets tired when I practice fingerspelling.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

7. I feel jerky and awkward, not smooth when I fingerspell.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

8. I sometimes reverse letters when I fingerspell.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

OFTEN		SOMETIMES		NEVER
1	2	3	4	5

## FOR RECEPTIVE SKILLS:

9. I can't read fingerspelling. I always ask signers to slow down.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

10. I panic when someone fingerspells and then I block on the word.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

11. I can read fingerspelling, but I have to look at the hand.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

12. When someone spells fast, I miss some of the letters.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

13. I find myself relying on mouth movements (speechreading) when I'm trying to read fingerspelling.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

## OVERALL EVALUATION:

14. I'd rather invent signs and not have to fingerspell or read it back.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

15. Fingerspelling is no fun!

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

Now you will be referred to specific sections of the accompanying video which will focus on the areas you have indicated. Remember, you may first want to view the entire tape to get an overview. In any case, be sure to view Section I in order to understand the philosophy and techniques being presented.

## RESULTS OF YOUR SELF-EVALUATION

---

If after viewing the tape, your rating score is below 45, you may wish to spend additional time studying the video and enroll in a fingerspelling class at your local college or agency. For those who show moderate-to-strong agreement with the self-rating of 1, 2 or 3 with any of the 15 statements, here are some suggestions:

### EXPRESSIVE SKILLS:

- 1. Letter formation:** The last part of Section II offers some guidelines for clear fingerspelling. Section III demonstrates appropriate handshapes, acceptable variations and tips for hand position.
- 2. Hard-to-read:** The guidelines at the end of Section II and the demonstration of handshapes in Section III provide strategies for correction. In addition, the metronome practice in Section IV will encourage you to attend to each letter as you slow down, then increase your speed to match the beat. Often sloppy spelling is due to hurrying. Practice slow, clear spelling, and then increase your speed after you have established good spelling habits.
- 3. Stumble/omit letters:** Slow down. Use the metronome practice suggested in Section IV. Practice makes perfect!
- 4. Slow/think of each letter:** Practice spelling words in your environment until you are sure you know each letter. Section IV will help you increase your speed gradually. Though the metronome is not a natural rhythm, you can “match” the beat while you fingerspell; then increase your fingerspelling speed as the metronome speeds up.
- 5. Can’t spell:** Do not worry too much if you misspell words occasionally. Pay attention to words you see in print, and practice word demons that present a problem for you. Consult books on the market that offer tips to increase vocabulary and improve spelling.
- 6. Tired:** You may be too tense, so relax your fingers as you imitate each handshape. Move your fingers directly from one shape into the next without adding other movements. Try to slow down, limit the amount of time you practice, and follow suggestions for warm-up and stretching exercises.
- 7. Awkward:** Relax your fingers, slow down and try the metronome exercises in Section IV.
- 8. Reversals:** If you consistently reverse letters, try slowing down and being more conscious of your fingerspelling. If you are dyslexic, any problems you face in reading/writing print might carry over to fingerspelling. Correct spelling may require more effort on your part.

### RECEPTIVE SKILLS:

- 9. Need spellers to slow down:** Section I and II provide the information to help you establish proper habits of reading fingerspelled words as whole units. Section V gives lots of practice in reading words fingerspelled at normal speed. Do not continue the habit of asking signers to slow down. Ask for repetitions and try “sounding out the word.” Use the three C’s suggested in Section I.
  - 10. Anxiety:** Successful experiences reading fingerspelling can improve your self-confidence and reduce your anxiety. Try reviewing Section V without sound/captions and practice reading the fingerspelling until you feel more relaxed. Even if you watch this section many times, you will still be using the three C’s to read the words and will develop the habit of reading words as whole units.
  - 11. Look at hand:** Review the tips in Section I and II about where to look. Practice reviewing Section V as described in #10, forcing yourself to watch the speller’s face. With practice, you will find yourself needing to look at the hand less often.
  - 12. Miss letters:** See #10 for suggestions on receptive practice in Section V. Be aware that some of the spelling that seems so fast may actually be Loan Signs. Review Section VI of the video for information and examples on this topic.
  - 13. Rely on mouth cues:** Many people are natural speechreaders and use that skill to supplement their reading of fingerspelling. Read fingerspelled words as though they are whole units; practice the techniques suggested in Section V with a friend or family member without allowing any mouthing. Build self-confidence.
  - 14. Avoid fingerspelling:** Fingerspelling is an important component of American Sign Language. Review Section I to understand how children learn to use and read fingerspelling naturally. Instead of inventing signs to avoid fingerspelling, one should approach the language of the Deaf community with respect, and aim to develop appropriate skills and techniques in usage.
  - 15. No fun:** Fingerspelling need not be all drudgery! For some fun with fingerspelled words, see Section VII on creative uses of the manual alphabet.
- Efforts to improve may not be evident immediately. After three months of implementing suggested strategies, re-evaluate yourself. Improvement will be reflected in a higher total score approaching 75. Note areas of improvement and focus on areas needing more attention.**



# REPETITIVE MOTION INJURY

by GARY SANDERSON

## REPETITIVE MOTION INJURY

In any endeavor which requires the hand or arm to move repetitively for long periods of time, there is a risk for the development of what is known as Repetitive Motion Injury (RMI). RMI is rapidly becoming an epidemic among many workers in American society today. RMI is a term which encompasses a whole range of medical conditions. The most frequently seen among signers and fingerspellers are Carpal Tunnel Syndrome, Ulnar Nerve Entrapment, Brachial Neuralgia and Tendonitis. Although there are many different conditions, they are all caused by the same thing. Simply put, whenever the hand or arm moves, using the same motion(s), over 15,000 times in a day without adequate rest breaks, your risk for developing RMI is greatly increased. Looking at fingerspelling or signing, one can see that the risk of developing RMI is great. When practicing fingerspelling, you can very rapidly approach the 15,000 mark in just over an hour. If you practice a few hours a day, you may be putting yourself at risk. However, RMI is preventable! By following a few simple precautions and knowing the symptoms, you can avoid possible serious and permanent injury.

## SYMPTOMS OF RMI

The progress of RMI from a minor discomfort to a disability has been documented by Stone (1984). The signs Stone refers to are swelling, numbness, tingling, redness, burning sensations and a loss of range of motion. Do not ignore these signs as they are your body's way of warning you that you may be having a problem. If you experience any of these symptoms, monitor yourself closely. If they begin to progress, seek medical attention immediately. *Do not deny the pain.*

## PREVENTION OF RMI

How can you prevent this from happening to you? By following a few simple steps, you can lessen your chances of injury.

1. Always warm up prior to practicing your fingerspelling. Signing or fingerspelling when your hands are cold should never be done.
2. Begin doing your "Signercises" now. Warm up using these before each practice session.
3. Do not practice your fingerspelling for hours on end. Practice expressive fingerspelling for no more than 20 minutes at a time, then change to receptive practice for 10 to 15 minutes.
4. Begin an exercise program that will develop opposing muscle groups. A doctor, chiropractor, or athletic trainer can develop a program best suited to your individual needs.

5. Do not switch dominant hands. Your non-dominant hand is at much greater risk for RMI. If your hand hurts, REST!
6. Check your other daily activities. Are your hobbies or daily routines repetitive in nature? You may want to change your daily routine on your practice days.
7. Cool down after each session. As a matter of routine, cool down by putting an ice pack on for a few minutes after each session. This reduces any inflammation.

Remember that RMI is preventable. By taking these few simple precautions, you should be able to avoid injury.

## SIGNERCISES

### General considerations:

Avoid signing when hands are cold. Exercise and stretch to non-painful ranges. *Know the difference between stretch and pain.* There should be no pain *after* stretching or exercising.

### Warm up exercises:

Shoulder shrug 5 times forward, then backwards 5 times. Hold arms at 90 degrees and turn palms over 5 times. Open and close fists rapidly 5-10 times. Circle wrists counter-clockwise and clockwise 5-10 times in each direction. Spread and close fingers 5-10 times each hand. Sign alphabet at moderate speed once. Shake hand out. *This should be done any time hands feel tight.*

### Stretching exercises

Align neck so ears are above shoulders. Turn head to the left 5 seconds, then to right. Drop chin to chest for 5 seconds. Repeat. Place hands in prayer position with only finger tips touching, lift elbows and press fingers in backward direction. Hold for 5 seconds and repeat 5 times. Arm out straight, palm down, bend at wrist and push down on back of hand with opposite hand. Hold for 5 seconds and repeat 5 times. Change hands. Arm out straight, palm up, push fingers downward with opposite hand (wrist should bend backward). Repeat 5 times with 5 second hold. Change hands.

**Remember, if an exercise or activity causes pain...omit it.**

Developed by: *Vanet Yapp*, R.P.T  
California State University, Northridge  
Student Health Center, Jan. 12, 1984

## WORD ACTIVITIES

To enhance your ability to see word patterns and to give you practice in making *closure* by identifying “hidden” words, three paper and pencil activities are included in this instructional booklet. The vocabulary is taken from key ideas presented in the video to provide a review of the information presented.

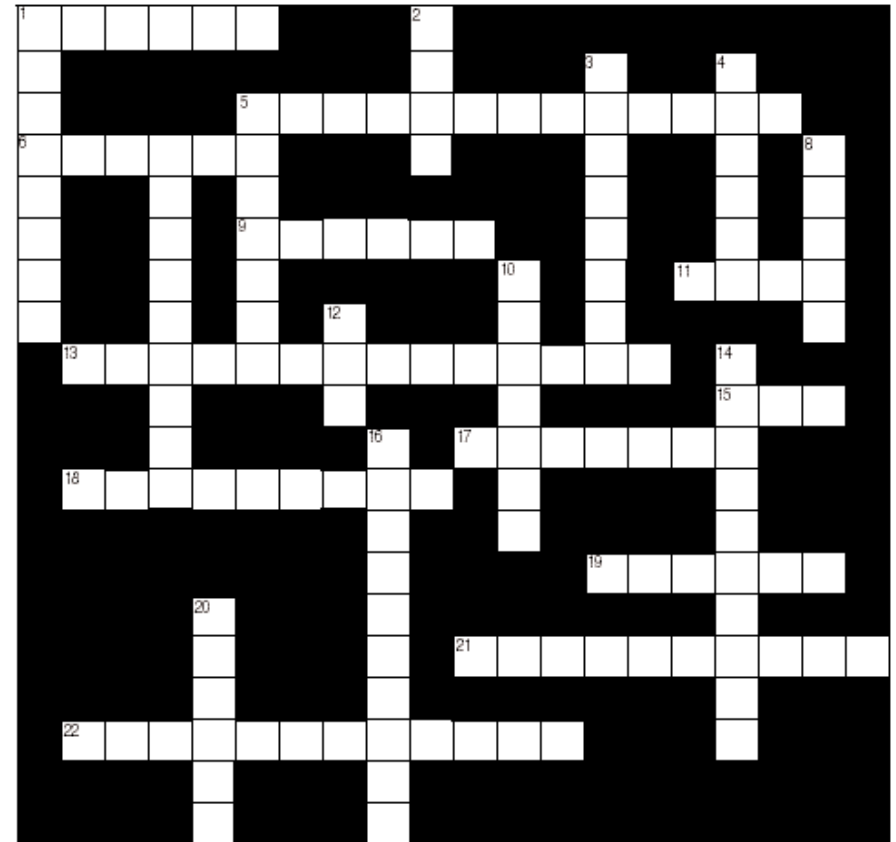
### Crossword Puzzle

#### ACROSS

1. conducted research on children's acquisition of fingerspelling
5. word shape
6. Deaf anthropologist
9. abbreviation for simultaneous communication
11. California State University, Northridge
13. manual alphabet
15. American Sign Language
17. conversation topic or setting
18. Deaf colleague and professor at CSUN
19. instructor of class
21. common repetitive motion injury
22. changes due to influence of handshapes on letter formations within words

#### DOWN

1. what you must do to improve skills
2. National Technical Institute of the Deaf
3. conducted research on lexical borrowing in ASL
4. a, e, i, o, u and sometimes y
5. filling in gaps and missing information
7. instrument used to keep time in music
8. signs borrowed from English spelling
10. host of video class
12. language used by Deaf people in Quebec
14. groups of related words
16. Reagan's favorite candy
20. signer in 1913 NAD film



## Word Search

Hidden in this word search are names of states that were given in the video as examples of *loan signs*:

Alabama; Connecticut; Florida; Georgia; Kentucky;  
Louisiana; Massachusetts; Michigan; Minnesota; Missouri;  
Nebraska; New Jersey; Pennsylvania; and Wisconsin

W X B C O F N Y N Z D A A C Z Y W P Q N T  
V I R U N T E S P E N N S Y L V A N I A S  
D F G E A H J K M S B L X P D B C E K N E  
R W A G G P E S U I A R L B H I U W F A R  
M O I S I Y G E O R G I A N X H P J D I B  
T Z A S H R X H C U C E T S N O W E A S M  
R I A H C A S I R O Z F N B K U J R G I D  
Y H B Z I O T E N S G R Y N P A D S C U I  
F K G U M I N N E S O T A S L R H E R O K  
X A C M A N E S T I J Z B A U F O Y L L H  
H M N U E C U E I M Q S B R W O R D S P G  
G L Y A T U R B F N Z A D I R O L F W J R  
Y D W I N N E R S O M L L E P S I A X K C  
N S C Q R U E H M A S S A C H U S E T T S  
B U L R P N O K T D C W E K H M B I A F L  
T N O E H S B A I U Y Z M O N P D T H O A

Now, try the same Word Search again and see how many other words and names of people you can find hidden: (2-letter words do not count.)

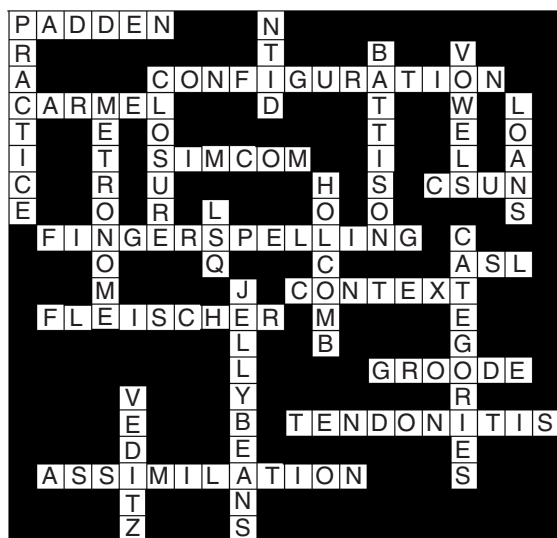
## Scrambled Words

Unscramble these words to find the Jelly Bean Flavors presented in the video for receptive practice of a *restricted set*. You may wish to fingerspell to yourself or to a partner for practice.

1. enrgao \_\_\_\_\_
2. lojeñaap \_\_\_\_\_
3. nootc ynda \_\_\_\_\_
4. ernge pleap \_\_\_\_\_
5. ami ati \_\_\_\_\_
6. nootccu \_\_\_\_\_
7. tiutt iutftri \_\_\_\_\_
8. ponalcaeut \_\_\_\_\_
9. perag \_\_\_\_\_
10. rberbyelu \_\_\_\_\_
11. cartipo \_\_\_\_\_
12. nowrtaleme \_\_\_\_\_

## ANSWER KEYS

### Crossword Puzzle



### Word Search



### Scrambled Words

1. orange
2. jalapeno
3. cotton candy
4. green apple
5. mai tai
6. coconut
7. tutti-frutti
8. cantaloupe
9. grape
10. blueberry
11. apricot
12. watermelon

## SUPPLEMENTARY READINGS

For teachers or serious students of fingerspelling, the following sources may provide useful information:

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