

SIGNING
Naturally



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Signing Naturally Student Workbook, Units 1–6.
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SIGNING NATURALLY

Introduction

The Signing Naturally Units 1-6 Student Workbook and DVDs are designed to complement course work in American Sign Language (ASL). These introductory materials, along with class instruction, give you basic vocabulary, grammar, and expressive practice to develop your everyday conversational skills in ASL.

This introduction will cover information about what to expect in the classroom, provide brief information about ASL, Deaf Culture, and the Deaf community, review the materials, and tell you how to prepare for class.

You're Taking an ASL Class!

Since you've enrolled in this course, you probably already have an interest in ASL. Maybe you've seen an interpreter at a performance or in a classroom. Or you've met a Deaf person, have a Deaf family member, friend or neighbor. Now that you've decided to learn ASL, be prepared to open your mind to a new language and culture.

Human communication is really a set of symbols (this applies to signs, sounds and printed pictures or words) that users agree have the same meaning. For ASL, an obvious difference from spoken language is the *modality*, which for ASL is visual and gestural. Students of ASL can expect to acquire many insights, not only into the universal aspects common to all languages, but also specific information that is found in studying ASL and learning about its community of users.

A Brief History of ASL

For over 250 years, ASL has evolved in the U.S. and Canada as the means for Deaf people to express and share their ideas, needs and thoughts. Although it is primarily Deaf people who use ASL, hearing people around them acquire and use the language also. They are children born to Deaf parents, siblings of Deaf children, other family members, neighbors, friends, co-workers, supervisors or employees of Deaf people. Since the mid-1960s when linguists recognized ASL as a distinct language (something that was true all along, but only “discovered in the 1960s), a growing number of hearing people have elected to learn ASL in major colleges, universities, and high schools throughout the country.

The origins of ASL can be traced to a couple of major historical influences. There is evidence that in the 1600s some of the inhabitants of Martha’s Vineyard off Cape Cod had a genetic pool that resulted in a large number of Deaf people in the community. This in turn resulted in naturally formed signing communities on the island. Likewise, on the mainland, various indigenous signs were used where Deaf people were members of villages. These regional sign languages were brought by the students to the first school for the Deaf founded in Hartford, Connecticut, in 1817.

The second major influence was French Sign Language, brought by the school’s founders, Laurent Clerc, a Deaf teacher from France, and Thomas Gallaudet, a hearing American minister. The blending of the indigenous sign language and French sign language formed the basis for ASL today.

Similar to other language minority groups within the U.S., it is common for the native language to be acquired within the family. This process is true for only 8-10% of Deaf children who are born into families with Deaf members. A larger percentage of Deaf children, around 70%, are raised in hearing families that do not sign. The remaining 20% of Deaf children have hearing families who use ASL and embrace Deaf culture. For Deaf children, the Deaf residential school has been the primary venue for learning ASL. The constant exposure to signing Deaf peers, Deaf teachers and dorm counselors has made it possible for the children to develop fluency in the language.

Bilingual Education and Oralism

The early 19th century saw ASL flourish through residential schools, which had immense success in Deaf education utilizing ASL and written English. Gallaudet University was founded in 1864 with a charter signed by President Abraham Lincoln. Gallaudet University was (and still is) a bastion for using signing in higher education as well as contributing to the standardization ASL among Deaf people in other states where many graduates returned home to teach.

From there, highly evolved Deaf signing communities formed complex networks all across the country. The communities maintained constant contact through organized sports, conferences, social and political events, and the arts.

However, a pivotal moment in ASL and Deaf America’s history occurred in 1880, with repercussions that are still being felt today. At the International Congress on the Education of the Deaf Conference in Milan, Italy, educa-

tors who supported oral instruction for Deaf students successfully blocked the influence of educators supporting Sign language. The congress voted in favor of oral education for all Deaf children. In a span of 40 years following the conference, the percentage of Deaf children being taught by the oral method grew from a very small percentage to an astounding 80%. Before that, Deaf teachers constituted 45% of all teachers of the Deaf, but that figure went down to only 11%. In many parts of Europe, Deaf teachers were dismissed because they were unable to teach speech. The oral approach to Deaf education became a contentious issue for the next century and a half, reflecting the broader society's misplaced belief that spoken language is superior to sign language.

Fortunately, during that time, Deaf children lived most of the year at schools. Despite not understanding much of what went on in the classroom, after school, in the dormitory and on the playing fields, ASL was still used to exchange information, to share understandings and learn other life lessons. Generally, at best, ASL was tolerated by the staff in the dormitories. This approach (banning signing in the classroom, and tolerating it outside the classroom) took its toll on the general Deaf community. Deaf people's perception of ASL and themselves as capable human beings diminished drastically. Confidence and pride waned as the quality of education declined for Deaf people. What carried them through those years was the ability to continue networking with each other at the Deaf clubs, Gallaudet University, and other social events.

The 1960s and Onward

In the 1960s, linguists at Gallaudet University proved that ASL is a fully developed independent language unrelated to English. From there, a resurgence of a positive view of ASL and Deaf culture empowered Deaf people to reclaim control of the institutions that impact their lives. In 1988, when the Board of Trustees at Gallaudet University selected a hearing president who didn't know ASL, the students staged a weeklong protest and succeeded in appointing the first Deaf president of the university.

Interestingly, while Deaf people have struggled for decades to bring ASL back to the classroom as the language of instruction in Deaf education, ASL enjoys tremendous popularity among hearing parents and their babies. Literature shows that learning signs early in infancy has a positive effect on general language development and enhances the parent-child relationship. Studies further show that signing babies understand more words, have a larger vocabulary and engage in more sophisticated play than non-signing babies. Yet the language has not been systematically made available to many Deaf babies.

Issues surrounding ASL and Deaf education continue to be contentious, but the resiliency of ASL in the face of many obstacles is a testament to its value in meeting the powerful human need for communication.

A Brief Introduction to Deaf Culture

There are two popular uses of the word culture. One means to have a sophisticated taste or to be well read, appreciate art, literature, cuisine—to be cultured. The other use of culture relates to the unique attributes of a certain group of people. Various groups of people develop distinctive ways of describing, valuing, and behaving in the world. This is their culture. Anthropologists have been formally studying world cultures for years, and mindful people have been pondering and examining culture as long as human societies have existed. Yet, having a deep understanding of culture still can be elusive.

One way of understanding a culture is to look at how the members identify themselves. Over the years different terms have been used to refer to Deaf people. Some older terms are considered offensive today and should not be used, especially “deaf and dumb” and “deaf mute.” The terms “hearing impaired,” “deaf and hard of hearing,” or “people with hearing loss” have been used by public institutions, political groups, and some individuals, as an attempt to be inclusive, but those terms focus on what is perceived as lacking or lost. The term “Deaf” with a capital “D” is an inclusive term because it focuses on what people *have*—a living culture, an available language, and the infinite, untapped possibilities being Deaf can offer.

People within Deaf culture value being kept informed about the environment, the community, and its members. Since the majority culture’s primary ways of disseminating information are not visually centered, Deaf people are expected to have a sense of social obligation and duty to others within Deaf

culture. This includes sharing information and offering updates on what is going on in the Deaf world as well as the broader world. In fulfilling this duty to the group, one tends to develop long-term relationships and complex networking systems. Similar to more than 70% of cultures in the world (many found in Africa, Asia and Latin America), in Deaf culture the group comes before the individual. Although the Deaf community recognizes individual achievements and talents, contributing to the group’s success is very highly valued. This is different than in American culture where great emphasis is placed on independence, self-reliance, achievement and individual success.

One visible cultural behavior among Deaf signers is how their eyes are used during signed interactions. For example, while watching another person sign, they would focus on the signer’s face, while reading the signs within their peripheral vision. This is to get valuable information about the grammar of the sentence which is shown simultaneously on the face.

Another visible cultural behavior among Deaf signers is how they get other people’s attention. Examples are waving in others’ peripheral vision, tapping on certain parts of the body and/or hitting a surface to create vibrations.

Yet another visible cultural behavior is how Deaf people locate themselves and move among people in signing situations. For example, if a path is blocked by two signers conversing, the Deaf person does not wait until the signers stop talking, bend down to pass, or find another path, but just walks through.

It's considered rude when one watches a signed conversation in public and not inform the signers you know ASL. Additionally, a person who knows ASL and chooses to speak without signing in front of Deaf people can be considered disrespectful and insensitive to Deaf people.

Throughout this book there are examples of cultural behavior typical in the Deaf community. Since the concept of culture is complex, it may take time and personal experience to identify the distinctive qualities of Deaf culture and more fully understand them. Until you have more exposure to and connection with Deaf culture, it is best to have an open mind, be respectful, and enjoy the uniqueness of Deaf culture and the challenge and fun of using ASL.

Debunking Some Myths about ASL

Probably the most important myth to debunk is that "ASL is a visual code for English, written or spoken." The differences are significant. ASL and English use different modalities (visual/gesture/ as opposed to aural/oral), and have different phonology and grammar. For new students, it is important to avoid reliance on English syntax and usage while signing, since this will result in a poor command of ASL.

Another common myth to debunk is that ASL is a language of pictures and pantomime. If true, nobody would have problems understanding ASL! Although some signs in ASL appear to have features similar to actual things or actions, most ASL signs do not.

Another myth to debunk is that ASL is a universal language understood by all signers in the world. In fact, there are hundreds of identified sign languages in the world, most

of them developed indigenously by Deaf people in their countries.

What to Expect in the Classroom

All communication in the classroom will be in ASL. This approach, which immerses you in the language, is the best way to become comfortable with the language, retain what you've learned, and improve both your *receptive* and *expressive* skills.

There are no English equivalents in this workbook. That means, while there are some signs that have a brief description in English to help you grasp the meaning, avoid "assigning" the meaning of an English word to an ASL sign. Many ASL signs simply are not directly translatable to English words. So if you develop a habit of seeing ASL signs and doing a mental run through of English, you will often make wrong sign choices. ASL signs are best learned through use and context.

Often students are tempted to hold on to the crutch of English by speaking while signing. This is not a good idea. Trying to speak and sign results in bad ASL syntax and grammar. The faster you can develop a complete reliance on ASL only when signing, the more quickly you will progress.

The classroom most likely will be set up so all students sit in a semi-circle so that every one can see each other. Visually based language relies on people being able to see each other to see what is being signed. Watching every conversation, sign, and exchange will benefit your own language skills.

STUDENT MATERIALS

Student Workbook

The Student Workbook is used in the classroom, and also used outside the class, along with the Student DVDs, for additional study, review, and practice. The workbook is important and should be brought to each class.

The workbook has several sections:

- **Homework**

Homework is numbered by Unit, and corresponds with a lesson learned in class. For example, Homework 1.1 corresponds to your first lesson from Unit 1. The teacher will tell you which homework to complete after each class. Homework is mostly video-related and each homework section has instructions for you to follow.

- **Vocabulary Review**

Each unit has a vocabulary review section that includes important signs from the lesson and your homework. The video captures on the page have corresponding video for you to watch, study and practice.

- **Classroom Exercises**

These exercises are used in the classroom as part of the lesson. The exercises are developed specifically to provide the opportunity to use grammatical feature(s) and rehearse new vocabulary you learned during the lesson. Your teacher will tell you when to open your workbooks to these pages.

- **Video Captures**

The printed video captures are a reference to the clip on the video for that sign or phrase. Studying the video will always be a better way to review signs, but the printed video captures also have arrows added to show motion.


SIGNING NATURALLY

Homework 1:2


CARDINAL NUMBERS 1–10
Cardinal numbers are used to tell how many or for counting.

☺ **Cardinal Numbers 1–5**
As you watch Iva demonstrate these numbers, notice the following:


- palm faces in
- fingers spread apart when signing numbers 2–5




1




2



3



4



5


☺ **Cardinal Numbers 6–9**
As you watch Iva demonstrate these numbers, notice the following:

- palm faces out
- tap fingers and thumb twice
- fingers and thumb do not overlap


6 UNIT 1 • INTRODUCING ONESELF

VOCABULARY REVIEW


Greetings _____



or




Name _____




be named; name


Wh-Word Question Signs _____



used to ask what, as in a definition



used to ask who, as in identification of a person



used to ask for the location of something

VOCABULARY REVIEW 37

The basic five parameters of every sign are handshape, palm orientation, location, movement, and “non-manual” features such as facial expressions. When evaluating a video capture to study a sign, first identify how each of these elements contributes to the sign.

Because ASL is a visually active language the most difficult requirement of a sign illustration is to show movement. To facilitate the three-dimensional nature of signs, illustrations incorporate a number of helpful features.

Arrows show the direction, path, and repetition of the movement. Here are the arrows you will see.

- **Directional arrows** point in the direction the sign is to be made.



- **Bi-directional arrows** indicate a back and forth motion.



- **Path arrows** show you the path of the sign’s movement.



- **Repetitive arrows** indicate that the sign’s movement repeats twice or more.



A touch is when part of the sign touches the chest, shoulder, or other part of the body. Touches are shown with touch marks.



When a sign is supposed to be “wiggled” or moved back and forth slightly, there will be wiggle marks indicating this. Here are examples of wiggle marks.



The video captures in this book are meant only as a reference point to the DVD. The DVD is the main source of information about the signs, and you should use it as the primary source of information about the signs included in this book.

You will also see video captures in a rounded box, these do not have a corresponding clip on the DVDs. Those captures look like this.



The Student DVDs

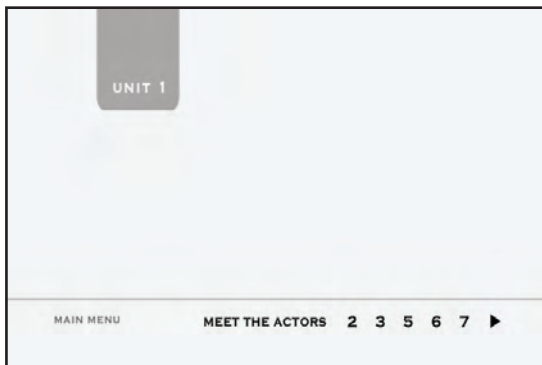
The Student DVDs contain video clips that correspond to homework in the workbook. Vocabulary Review sections help you study the signs in a “stand alone” way, outside of a dialogue.

There are two DVDs, disk one, and disk two. Disk one contains the video material for Units 1–3, and disk two contains the video material for Units 4–6.

The main menu of the DVD looks like this.



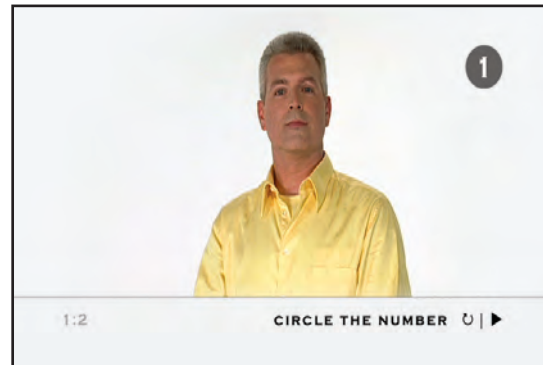
After you select a Unit, a Homework menu appears so you can choose the homework section you want to study. For the Vocabulary Review of that unit, you will see VR. Select that to study the vocabulary for the unit.



As video clips play, the “navigation bar” remains on the screen, indicating which unit and homework you are watching (see the close up below). For example, if the number shows 1:2, it means you are watching Homework 1 from Unit 2.



At the end of video clips that require you to write, draw, or answer, two symbols appear that allow you to play the section again, or move on to the next numbered question.



After you have watched all of the video clips for a specific homework, the DVD brings you back to the homework menu so you can choose which clips to watch next.

Remember these things when using the DVDs:

1. All of the instructions for how to use the video to complete your homework appear in the workbook. Read all instructions in the workbook before starting any activity.
2. The DVDs are designed for you to complete the homework section in one sitting. If you need to skip forward in the DVD, use your remote control or DVD controls on your computer. The video must be playing to skip forward, you can't skip forward through the numbered sections of the DVD unless the video is playing.

The signers in the Student DVDs are identified by their actual names in the workbook, unless they are acting out a story or dialogue using another name. You can “meet” the actors by playing the section on the Unit 1 menu.



Unit 6

Unit 6 is a storytelling unit. The goal of Unit 6 is to help you develop your narrative skills in ASL. Your teacher will decide when to assign homework from this unit, and it may be that homework from this unit is assigned alongside homework from other units as you progress through the class.

How to Prepare for Class

The amount of time you spend using ASL outside of class will greatly increase your ability to retain new vocabulary. One easy way to help remember what you learned in class is to do your homework as soon as you can. In a single day a person can lose up to 40% of what they have learned!

It is also helpful to form study groups with other classmates. Even if you come to class 10 minutes early and converse in ASL with others, it will be a good reinforcement of what you've learned.

Things to Remember as You Learn ASL

Why no English?

Often new students wonder why there are no English words offered as “equivalents” to ASL signs. There is a concept in language learning called *linguistic interference*. This happens when one language’s structure, meaning, and vocabulary hinders language students’ ability to engage with the second language on its own. It can be tempting to try and find English words that “match” signs. But it is best to leave English outside the classroom, and it has intentionally been separated from ASL signs in the book and videos.

In this introductory set of materials, basic meanings of signs are used, as is appropriate for new students. There are often many other nuances and meanings for signs that are not possible to cover in an introductory course. Please do not limit your understanding of an ASL sign by thinking there is a one-to-one correspondence to English words.

Another type of linguistic interference happens when you try to sign and speak at the same time. If you try this, your first language will most likely supercede the correct grammar for ASL, and often result in using the wrong signs to express what you want to say.

Both ASL and English are natural languages that can express anything, but they are also separate languages. Try to begin to think in ASL, matching concepts to signs. Your study of the language will benefit greatly.

Please Don’t Speak in Class

Even if you think whispering to your neighbor will not disrupt the classroom, remember that to listen in ASL means you are looking at the person signing and giving them your full attention. If you are talking in class, you not only interrupt your own learning, but you take others attention away from what is being taught. If you must get another person’s attention, please use behaviors appropriate to a visual, signing environment (see page 33 for information about this topic).

Relax and Have Fun!

As is true for all language courses that rely on immersion techniques, you may feel lost or unsure at times. But remember that the more you express yourself and learn to understand other signers, your progress with ASL will be smoother and more enjoyable.