

American Sign Language Fact Sheet

FACTS ABOUT AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE

- American Sign Language (ASL) is deeply rooted in the deaf community and culture.
- In 1817, the first school for deaf children was set up in Hartford, Connecticut.
- French Sign Language led to the standardization of early American Sign Language and its transformation into modern ASL.
- The folklore, the history of deaf people, cultural values, and the arts are expressed through the language and preserved.
- ASL is one of the most widely used languages in the United States by:
 - Deaf and hard-of-hearing persons,
 - Hearing children of deaf parents,
 - Hearing siblings and relatives of deaf persons,
 - Hearing adults who are becoming deaf, and
 - Hearing learners who have acquired ASL as a second language.
- Forty states recognize ASL as a foreign language and 46 states have secondary and/or post-secondary education programs that offer academic credit for ASL classes.
- Hundreds of American colleges and universities offer ASL classes.
- Qualified ASL teachers are certified by a national professional organization – the American Sign Language Teachers Association (ASLTA).
- Chapters of ASLTA and some universities (e.g. Gallaudet University, Columbia University, Western Maryland University, University of Rochester, University of Northern Colorado, Lamar University, McDaniel College, and Keuka College in New York) offer training in Deaf Studies and other ASL-related subjects.
- Using ASL as an instructional tool in educational programs supports deaf and hard-of-hearing students to learn English;
- Hearing families of deaf and hard-of-hearing children can enhance the quality of family communication and interaction at home;
- Cultivates family communication and interaction between family members;
- Deaf, hard-of-hearing, and hearing employees can strengthen their working relationships through enhanced cultural awareness;
- Increases job opportunities in the teaching field for deaf and hard-of-hearing people interested in becoming ASL teachers;
- Professionals in public and private agencies as well as educational settings serving deaf and hard-of-hearing people (e.g. teachers, counselors, consultants, therapists, specialists) can better understand and communicate with deaf and hard-of-hearing.
- Baby experts believe that frustration and tantrums can be reduced because it is easier for the toddler to communicate. Easier communication results in less time for the parent to struggle with understanding the toddler’s communications.
- For all children, communication is at the heart of child development—cognitive, social, emotional or behavioral (Vygotsky, 1978).

THE BENEFITS OF ASL

Having knowledge of ASL can be beneficial in various situations and relationships. Below are a few examples:

- Increased interaction between hearing students and deaf and hard-of-hearing students in mainstream programs at public schools and colleges and universities;
- Take an ASL class from a deaf teacher who uses a silent format. Preferably a teacher who is ASLTA certified.
- Expand your knowledge of ASL by using signs with deaf friends or coworkers.
- Be aware that some English words do not have an equivalent sign in ASL. Do not invent or

HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE TO LEARN SIGN LANGUAGE?

Depending on an individual’s level of commitment, it may take one or two years to learn enough sign language for basic communication. Some people pick up signs slower than others. If that is the case for you, don’t get discouraged; with patience and consistent practice you should make progress. Here are a few tips to help you get started:

make up a new sign; it may violate ASL grammatical rules and be considered offensive to ASL users. Fingerspell any unknown terms.

- ASL is a visual language; facial expressions and body movements play a significant role in conveying information.
- Sign language by itself is not a universal language – each country has its own sign language.
- ASL is a true language with its own syntax. Like all living languages, ASL evolves over-time to serve and accommodate the needs of ASL users.

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Information was also acquired from:
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