GoalTodo

Learn sign language: your first year of ASL, with Deaf signers

Learn sign language

52 weeks · Mon, Nov 30 → Sun, Nov 28

Week by week

Tick a box each time you do a session.

Nov 30–Dec 6
Week 1

Fingerspelling A to Z and hello

First signs

- [ ] [ ] ASL class: the manual alphabet, HELLO, NAME, NICE-MEET-YOU, and how to get a Deaf person's attention: a wave where they can see it, or a light tap on the shoulder
  2 hours
- [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] At home: fingerspell the alphabet slowly in front of a mirror, hand still and beside your shoulder. Then fingerspell your first name and three friends' names
  20 min
- [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] Fingerspelling and numbers: Sign along with your class's alphabet practice, then spell five short words you can see around you
  10 min

Done when: You can fingerspell A to Z and your own name clearly, and greet someone and tell them your name

Sticking point: Your hand will want to bounce with each letter. Keep it still and go slowly: clear matters more than fast.

Dec 7–13
Week 2

Questions on your face

First signs

- [ ] [ ] ASL class: DEAF, HEARING, LEARN, SIGN, YES, NO, and yes/no questions, which you ask with your eyebrows raised
  2 hours
- [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] At home: sign five yes/no questions to the mirror (YOU DEAF? YOU LEARN SIGN?) and check that your eyebrows go up on every one. Then answer each with YES or NO and a short sentence
  20 min
- [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] Fingerspelling: spell ten short words from around your home without looking at your hand
  10 min

Done when: You can ask and answer five yes/no questions about yourself, with your eyebrows doing the asking

Sticking point: Many hearing learners sign with a still face. In ASL your face is part of the grammar, so practise it from the first week.

Dec 14–20
Week 3

Numbers 1 to 20 and wh- questions

First signs

- [ ] ASL class: numbers 1 to 20 and the wh- questions (WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHEN, WHY, HOW), which your teacher will show with a different face from yes/no questions
  2 hours
- [ ] At home: ask and answer to the mirror: YOUR NAME WHAT? YOU LIVE WHERE? YOUR TEACHER WHO? Sign both sides, with the question face each time
  20 min
- [ ] Numbers: sign 1 to 20 forwards and back, then 15 random numbers from a list
  10 min

Done when: You can sign 1 to 20 without stopping, and ask four wh- questions with the face your teacher showed you

Dec 21–27
Week 4

Family

First signs

- [ ] ASL class: family signs (MOTHER, FATHER, SISTER, BROTHER, CHILD, MARRIED) and asking HOW-MANY
  2 hours
- [ ] At home: describe your family: how many people, each name fingerspelled, and one thing about each person
  20 min
- [ ] Fingerspelling and numbers: Fingerspell the names of everyone in your family, then sign numbers 1 to 30
  10 min

Done when: You can tell someone who is in your family and answer when they ask how many brothers and sisters you have

Dec 28–Jan 3
Week 5

Where you live, and numbers to 100

First signs

- [ ] [ ] ASL class: LIVE, FROM, the signs for your city, region and country, and numbers 21 to 100
  2 hours
- [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] At home: sign four sentences about where you live and where you grew up. If a place has no sign you've been taught, fingerspell it rather than making one up
  20 min
- [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] Numbers: 30 random numbers between 21 and 100, then fingerspell your street and town
  10 min

Done when: You can say where you live and where you're from, and sign any number up to 100

Sticking point: ASL numbers have their own handshapes and movements, and 6 to 9 look nothing like counting on your fingers. Copy your teacher, not a chart.

Jan 4–10
Week 6

Your week, and your first Deaf event

First signs

- [ ] [ ] ASL class: everyday verbs (WORK, EAT, SLEEP, DRIVE, READ) and the days of the week
  2 hours
- [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] At home: sign what you do on a normal weekday, then what you do on Saturday, in four sentences each
  20 min
- [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] Fingerspelling the other way round: have a classmate or friend spell ten words to you, or replay your class's practice, and write down each word
  10 min
- [ ] Deaf event: go to an event where ASL is the main language, such as a Deaf social, an ASL coffee night or an event at a Deaf club or a school for the Deaf. Go with a classmate if that helps, introduce yourself and say you're learning
  1 to 2 hours

Done when: You've introduced yourself in ASL to at least one Deaf person, and you can describe your week

Sticking point: Your first event will feel nerve-racking. Stay an hour, watch more than you sign, and ask people to sign slower or repeat when you're lost. People who know ASL are often patient with learners.

Jan 11–17
Week 7

Review week

First signs

- [ ] [ ] ASL class: carry on with your course as normal
  2 hours
- [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] At home: no new signs. Go back over weeks 1 to 6: try each week's 'done when' without notes, then practise whatever didn't come
  20 min
- [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] Fingerspelling and numbers: your name, address and phone number at a steady pace, then have someone spell ten words to you
  10 min

Done when: You can do every 'done when' from weeks 1 to 6 without notes

Jan 18–24
Week 8

Time and age

Everyday conversations

- [ ] [ ] ASL class: telling the time, how old someone is, and NOW, TODAY, TOMORROW, YESTERDAY
  2 hours
- [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] At home: sign your age and the ages of your family. Then say what time you do five things each day
  20 min
- [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] Numbers: ages, clock times and your phone number, at a steady pace
  10 min

Done when: You can say your age and other people's, and the time you do five daily things

Jan 25–31
Week 9

Feelings and your face

Everyday conversations

- [ ] [ ] ASL class: feelings and describing words (HAPPY, TIRED, SICK, NERVOUS, EXCITED) and how your face and the size of the sign show how much
  2 hours
- [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] At home: sign each feeling three ways: a little, normal and very. Change only your face and the size of the movement, and watch the difference in the mirror
  20 min
- [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] Fingerspelling: have someone spell ten names to you, or replay your class's practice, and write them down
  10 min

Done when: You can tell someone how you feel today and show 'a little' and 'very' with your face

Sticking point: Big expressions feel silly at first. They carry meaning in ASL, so let them show, and ask your teacher if you're not sure how much is right.

Feb 1–7
Week 10

School and work

Everyday conversations

- [ ] ASL class: WORK, SCHOOL, STUDENT, TEACHER, the signs for common jobs, and asking what someone does
  2 hours
- [ ] At home: describe your job or your studies in four sentences. Fingerspell your job if it has no sign you know yet
  20 min
- [ ] Numbers: years (the year you were born, the year you started your job)
  10 min
- [ ] Deaf event: a Deaf social or ASL night. Ask two people what they do, and tell them about your work
  1 to 2 hours

Done when: You can describe your work or study and ask someone about theirs

Feb 8–14
Week 11

Review week

Everyday conversations

- [ ] ASL class: carry on with your course as normal
  2 hours
- [ ] At home: no new signs. Go back over weeks 8 to 10: try each week's 'done when' without notes, then practise whatever didn't come
  20 min
- [ ] Fingerspelling and numbers: your name, address and phone number at a steady pace, then have someone spell ten words to you
  10 min

Done when: You can do every 'done when' from weeks 8 to 10 without notes

Feb 15–21
Week 12

Describing people

Everyday conversations

- [ ] ASL class: colours, clothes, and describing hair, height and glasses
  2 hours
- [ ] At home: describe three people you know well enough that someone could pick them out in a crowd
  20 min
- [ ] Fingerspelling: spell the colours and clothes you don't have signs for yet, then check them in class
  10 min

Done when: You can describe what someone looks like and what they're wearing

Feb 22–28
Week 13

Food and eating out

Everyday conversations

- [ ] [ ] ASL class: food and drink signs, LIKE, DON'T-LIKE, WANT, and ordering at a counter
  2 hours
- [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] At home: sign what you ate yesterday and three things you like and don't like. Role-play ordering a meal, both sides
  20 min
- [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] Numbers: prices and quantities for the food you order
  10 min

Done when: You can say what you like to eat and order a meal in a role-play

Mar 1–7
Week 14

Hobbies and weekends

Everyday conversations

- [ ] [ ] ASL class: hobbies and sports, and FINISH and other ways to show something is in the past
  2 hours
- [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] At home: tell what you did last weekend in five sentences, starting with a time sign (LAST WEEKEND, SATURDAY)
  20 min
- [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] Fingerspelling: have someone spell the names of places and teams to you, and write them down
  10 min
- [ ] Deaf event: ask one or two people about their hobbies, and tell them about yours
  1 to 2 hours

Done when: You can tell someone about your hobbies and what you did last weekend

Mar 8–14
Week 15

Review week

Everyday conversations

- [ ] [ ] ASL class: carry on with your course as normal
  2 hours
- [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] At home: no new signs. Go back over weeks 12 to 14: try each week's 'done when' without notes, then practise whatever didn't come
  20 min
- [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] Fingerspelling and numbers: your name, address and phone number at a steady pace, then have someone spell ten words to you
  10 min

Done when: You can do every 'done when' from weeks 12 to 14 without notes

Mar 15–21
Week 16

First level check

Everyday conversations

- [ ] ASL class: carry on with your course, and ask your teacher for five minutes of conversation with you this week
  2 hours
- [ ] At home: do the first level check in the guide without notes: fingerspell your full name and address, read back ten fingerspelled names, sign numbers to 100, and hold a five-minute conversation about yourself, your family and your work
  20 min
- [ ] Fingerspelling and numbers: whatever the check showed you're slowest at
  10 min

Done when: You've done the first level check and written down two things to work on

Mar 22–28
Week 17

Places and directions

Space and stories

- [ ] ASL class: places in town (SHOP, BANK, LIBRARY, HOSPITAL) and giving directions using the space in front of you
  2 hours
- [ ] At home: sign the way from your home to a shop near you, placing each landmark in space as you go
  20 min
- [ ] Fingerspelling: street names near you, then have someone spell five to you
  10 min

Done when: You can give directions to two places near you, and follow simple directions from your teacher

Sticking point: Directions in ASL are drawn in the space in front of you. Picture the map from where you stand, not from above.

Mar 29–Apr 4
Week 18

Pointing in space

Space and stories

- [ ] [ ] ASL class: placing people and things in the space around you, pointing back to them, and verbs that move between them (GIVE, ASK, TELL)
  2 hours
- [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] At home: tell a short exchange: a friend asked your sister something and she told you. Set each person in a place and keep them there
  20 min
- [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] Numbers: times and dates for things you've planned this month
  10 min
- [ ] Deaf event: watch how people point to someone who isn't there, then tell one person about your family using space
  1 to 2 hours

Done when: You can talk about two people who aren't there, keep them in their places, and show who did what to whom

Apr 5–11
Week 19

Review week

Space and stories

- [ ] [ ] ASL class: carry on with your course as normal
  2 hours
- [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] At home: no new signs. Go back over weeks 16 to 18: try each week's 'done when' without notes, then practise whatever didn't come
  20 min
- [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] Fingerspelling and numbers: your name, address and phone number at a steady pace, then have someone spell ten words to you
  10 min

Done when: You can do every 'done when' from weeks 16 to 18 without notes

Apr 12–18
Week 20

Your home and first classifiers

Space and stories

- [ ] [ ] ASL class: rooms and furniture, and classifiers: handshapes that stand for a kind of object and show where it is and how it moves
  2 hours
- [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] At home: describe your living room: where the door, window, sofa and table are, using the classifiers from class
  20 min
- [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] Fingerspelling: words for things in your home that have no sign you know
  10 min

Done when: You can describe a room in your home so someone could sketch it

Sticking point: Classifiers feel like a second language inside ASL. Learn the handshapes from your teacher and copy them exactly before you try your own descriptions.

Apr 19–25
Week 21

Routines and time

Space and stories

- [ ] ASL class: EVERY-DAY, EVERY-WEEK, EVERY-MONDAY and other signs for regular times, and how ASL shows past and future
  2 hours
- [ ] At home: describe your week in order, using the time signs, then what you did last week and what you'll do next week
  20 min
- [ ] Numbers: dates, days of the month and times
  10 min

Done when: You can describe your routine and say what you did and will do

Apr 26–May 2
Week 22

Weather, seasons and plans

Space and stories

- [ ] ASL class: weather and season signs, and talking about plans (WILL, PLAN, MAYBE)
  2 hours
- [ ] At home: sign what the weather is like today and what you plan to do this weekend and next month
  20 min
- [ ] Fingerspelling: have someone spell the names of towns and months to you
  10 min
- [ ] Deaf event: ask two people about their plans for the next holiday, and tell them yours
  1 to 2 hours

Done when: You can talk about the weather and your plans for the next month

May 3–9
Week 23

Review week

Space and stories

- [ ] ASL class: carry on with your course as normal
  2 hours
- [ ] At home: no new signs. Go back over weeks 20 to 22: try each week's 'done when' without notes, then practise whatever didn't come
  20 min
- [ ] Fingerspelling and numbers: your name, address and phone number at a steady pace, then have someone spell ten words to you
  10 min

Done when: You can do every 'done when' from weeks 20 to 22 without notes

May 10–16
Week 24

Size and shape

Space and stories

- [ ] [ ] ASL class: classifiers for size and shape: thin, thick, round, flat, striped
  2 hours
- [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] At home: describe five objects without naming them, and see whether a classmate can guess what they are
  20 min
- [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] Numbers: measurements and sizes (how big, how long, how many)
  10 min

Done when: You can describe an object's size and shape clearly enough for someone to guess it

May 17–23
Week 25

Telling what happened

Space and stories

- [ ] [ ] ASL class: short stories in the past, and role shift: turning your shoulders and face to show who is talking
  2 hours
- [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] At home: tell a two-minute story about something that happened this week. Film yourself on your phone and watch it back
  20 min
- [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] Fingerspelling: have someone spell names from your story to you at full speed
  10 min

Done when: You've told and filmed a two-minute story, with at least two people in it shown by role shift

Sticking point: Role shift is easy to overdo. Small turns of the shoulders and a change of eye line are enough; your teacher will show you.

May 24–30
Week 26

Your body and a doctor's visit

Space and stories

- [ ] [ ] ASL class: body parts, HURT, SICK, and making an appointment
  2 hours
- [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] At home: role-play making an appointment and saying where something hurts, both sides
  20 min
- [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] Numbers: times, dates and phone numbers for appointments
  10 min
- [ ] [ ] Deaf event: by now, aim to stay in ASL for the whole time, and ask people to sign again when you miss something
  1 to 2 hours

Done when: You can say where something hurts and make an appointment in a role-play

May 31–Jun 6
Week 27

Review week

Space and stories

- [ ] ASL class: carry on with your course as normal
  2 hours
- [ ] At home: no new signs. Go back over weeks 24 to 26: try each week's 'done when' without notes, then practise whatever didn't come
  20 min
- [ ] Fingerspelling and numbers: your name, address and phone number at a steady pace, then have someone spell ten words to you
  10 min

Done when: You can do every 'done when' from weeks 24 to 26 without notes

Jun 7–13
Week 28

Shopping and money

Space and stories

- [ ] ASL class: money and prices, BUY, COST, and asking for a different size or colour
  2 hours
- [ ] At home: role-play shopping for clothes: ask the price, ask for a different size, and pay
  20 min
- [ ] Numbers: prices in dollars and cents
  10 min

Done when: You can ask what something costs and buy it in a role-play

Jun 14–20
Week 29

Travel and getting around

Space and stories

- [ ] ASL class: car, bus, train and plane signs, classifiers for vehicles, and talking about a trip
  2 hours
- [ ] At home: describe a trip you've taken: how you got there, where you went and what happened, in two minutes
  20 min
- [ ] Fingerspelling: places you've travelled to, then have someone spell five to you
  10 min

Done when: You can describe a trip and show how a vehicle moved with a classifier

Jun 21–27
Week 30

Deaf culture and history

Space and stories

- [ ] ASL class: carry on with your course, and ask your teacher about Deaf history and culture where you live
  2 hours
- [ ] At home: read or watch one piece on Deaf history or culture made by Deaf people, such as the NAD, a school for the Deaf or Gallaudet University, then sign a two-minute summary
  20 min
- [ ] Fingerspelling: names of Deaf people and places from what you read
  10 min
- [ ] Deaf event: ask someone how long they've been coming to this group, and what they'd like hearing learners to know
  1 to 2 hours

Done when: You can say three things you've learned about Deaf history or culture where you live

Jun 28–Jul 4
Week 31

Review week

Space and stories

- [ ] ASL class: carry on with your course as normal
  2 hours
- [ ] At home: no new signs. Go back over weeks 28 to 30: try each week's 'done when' without notes, then practise whatever didn't come
  20 min
- [ ] Fingerspelling and numbers: your name, address and phone number at a steady pace, then have someone spell ten words to you
  10 min

Done when: You can do every 'done when' from weeks 28 to 30 without notes

Jul 5–11
Week 32

Second level check

Space and stories

- [ ] ASL class: carry on with your course, and ask your teacher or a Deaf signer for ten minutes of conversation this week
  2 hours
- [ ] At home: do the second level check in the guide without notes: a ten-minute conversation about your routine, directions to a place near you and your plans
  20 min
- [ ] Fingerspelling and numbers: whatever the check showed you're slowest at
  10 min

Done when: You've done the second level check and written down two things to work on

Jul 12–18
Week 33

Where you grew up

Longer conversations

- [ ] ASL class: talking about your childhood, school and where you grew up
  2 hours
- [ ] At home: tell the first part of your life story: where you grew up, your school and one memory. Film it
  20 min
- [ ] Fingerspelling: names of places and schools from your life
  10 min

Done when: You can talk for three minutes about where you grew up

Jul 19–25
Week 34

Work and study in depth

Longer conversations

- [ ] ASL class: talking about what your work involves, how long you've done it and what you like about it
  2 hours
- [ ] At home: explain your job or studies to someone who knows nothing about it, in three minutes
  20 min
- [ ] Numbers: years and lengths of time (for five years, since 2020)
  10 min
- [ ] Deaf event: have one longer conversation, ten minutes or more, with the same person
  1 to 2 hours

Done when: You can explain what you do and answer questions about it

Jul 26–Aug 1
Week 35

Review week

Longer conversations

- [ ] [ ] ASL class: carry on with your course as normal
2 hours

- [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] At home: no new signs. Go back over weeks 32 to 34: try each week's 'done when' without notes, then practise whatever didn't come
20 min

- [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] Fingerspelling and numbers: your name, address and phone number at a steady pace, then have someone spell ten words to you
10 min

Done when: You can do every 'done when' from weeks 32 to 34 without notes

Aug 2–8
Week 36

Comparing and giving opinions

Longer conversations

- [ ] [ ] ASL class: comparing two things by placing them on either side of you, and THINK, PREFER, AGREE, DISAGREE
2 hours

- [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] At home: compare two places you've lived, or two jobs, and say which you prefer and why
20 min

- [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] Fingerspelling: have someone spell longer words, like city names and people's surnames, to you at full speed
10 min

Done when: You can compare two things and give a reason for your opinion

Aug 9–15
Week 37

Role shift in conversations

Longer conversations

- [ ] [ ] ASL class: using role shift to retell a conversation between two or three people
2 hours

- [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] At home: retell a conversation you had this week, showing each person by role shift. Film it and check you stayed consistent
20 min

- [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] Numbers: phone numbers and addresses signed at a normal pace
10 min

Done when: You can retell a conversation between two people so it's clear who said what

Aug 16–22
Week 38

Plans and invitations

Longer conversations

- [ ] [ ] ASL class: inviting someone, agreeing a time and place, and saying no politely
  2 hours
- [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] At home: role-play inviting a friend to a meal, agreeing the day and time, and changing the plan
  20 min
- [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] Fingerspelling: names of places to meet near you
  10 min
- [ ] Deaf event: invite a classmate or someone you've met to the next event, and make the plan in ASL
  1 to 2 hours

Done when: You can invite someone to something and agree the details

Aug 23–29
Week 39

Review week

Longer conversations

- [ ] [ ] ASL class: carry on with your course as normal
  2 hours
- [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] At home: no new signs. Go back over weeks 36 to 38: try each week's 'done when' without notes, then practise whatever didn't come
  20 min
- [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] Fingerspelling and numbers: your name, address and phone number at a steady pace, then have someone spell ten words to you
  10 min

Done when: You can do every 'done when' from weeks 36 to 38 without notes

Aug 30–Sep 5
Week 40

What's in the news

Longer conversations

- [ ] [ ] ASL class: current events signs, and summing up a story
  2 hours
- [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] At home: pick one news story and sum it up in two minutes, then say what you think about it
  20 min
- [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] Fingerspelling: names of people and places in the news
  10 min

Done when: You can sum up a news story and give your view

Sep 6–12
Week 41

Fingerspelling at full speed

Longer conversations

- [ ] ASL class: reading fingerspelling as a whole shape instead of letter by letter, and the short fingerspelled words that act like signs
  2 hours
- [ ] At home: have someone fingerspell twenty words to you at their normal speed, without slowing down. Read the shape of each word, then write it
  20 min
- [ ] Fingerspelling: your name, address and email at a steady, natural pace
  10 min

Done when: You can read most of twenty fingerspelled words at a fluent signer's speed

Sticking point: Everyone finds reading fingerspelling hard. Look at the shape of the whole word, not each letter, and guess from context.

Sep 13–19
Week 42

Explaining how to do something

Longer conversations

- [ ] ASL class: explaining a process step by step: FIRST, NEXT, THEN, FINISH
  2 hours
- [ ] At home: explain how to make something you cook, or how to do a task at work, step by step
  20 min
- [ ] Numbers: amounts and times in your explanation
  10 min
- [ ] Deaf event: ask someone to explain something they're good at, and ask questions as they go
  1 to 2 hours

Done when: You can explain a process in order so someone could follow it

Sep 20–26
Week 43

Review week

Longer conversations

- [ ] ASL class: carry on with your course as normal
  2 hours
- [ ] At home: no new signs. Go back over weeks 40 to 42: try each week's 'done when' without notes, then practise whatever didn't come
  20 min
- [ ] Fingerspelling and numbers: your name, address and phone number at a steady pace, then have someone spell ten words to you
  10 min

Done when: You can do every 'done when' from weeks 40 to 42 without notes

Sep 27–Oct 3
Week 44

Describing a place in detail

Longer conversations

- [ ] [ ] ASL class: using classifiers to describe a place: its layout, what's where and how you move through it
  2 hours
- [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] At home: describe your favourite place as if you were giving someone a tour. Film it
  20 min
- [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] Fingerspelling: names in your description
  10 min

Done when: You can describe a place so clearly that someone could find their way round it

Oct 4–10
Week 45

A story worth telling

Longer conversations

- [ ] [ ] ASL class: storytelling: setting the scene, role shift, and your face to show how people felt
  2 hours
- [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] At home: tell a three-minute story about a memorable day, with at least two people in it. Film it and compare it with the first story you filmed
  20 min
- [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] Numbers: dates and times in your story
  10 min
- [ ] Deaf event: tell one person a short story about yourself
  1 to 2 hours

Done when: You've told a three-minute story and can see how far you've come since your first one

Oct 11–17
Week 46

When you don't understand

Longer conversations

- [ ] [ ] ASL class: asking someone to sign again, slower, or to fingerspell a word again, and checking you've understood
  2 hours
- [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] At home: practise the repair phrases until they're automatic. Then watch a signed story from your class at full speed and note each place you got lost
  20 min
- [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] Fingerspelling: have someone spell words to you fast, and ask them to repeat in ASL each time you miss one
  10 min

Done when: You can stop a conversation politely, ask for a repeat, and check what you understood

Oct 18–24
Week 47

Review week

Longer conversations

- [ ] ASL class: carry on with your course as normal
  2 hours
- [ ] At home: no new signs. Go back over weeks 44 to 46: try each week's 'done when' without notes, then practise whatever didn't come
  20 min
- [ ] Fingerspelling and numbers: your name, address and phone number at a steady pace, then have someone spell ten words to you
  10 min

Done when: You can do every 'done when' from weeks 44 to 46 without notes

Oct 25–31
Week 48

Hopes and future plans

The finish

- [ ] ASL class: talking about the future: hopes, plans, IF and MAYBE
  2 hours
- [ ] At home: talk for three minutes about where you'd like to be in five years
  20 min
- [ ] Fingerspelling and numbers: your weakest from the last few weeks
  10 min
- [ ] Deaf event: tell someone why you're learning ASL and what you'd like to do with it
  1 to 2 hours

Done when: You can talk about your hopes and plans and say what might happen

Nov 1–7
Week 49

Get ready for your final conversation

The finish

- [ ] ASL class: carry on with your course, and tell your teacher about your final check
  2 hours
- [ ] At home: pick five topics: your life, your work, your family, a story and something in the news. Sign two minutes on each and film it
  20 min
- [ ] Fingerspelling: the names you'll use when you talk about your topics
  10 min

Done when: You've filmed two minutes on each of your five topics

Nov 8–14
Week 50

Practice conversations

The finish

- [ ] [ ] ASL class: ask your teacher for a 15-minute conversation with you on topics you don't choose
  2 hours
- [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] At home: watch your films from last week and redo the two weakest topics
  20 min
- [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] Fingerspelling: have someone spell to you at full speed
  10 min
- [ ] Deaf event: stay in ASL the whole time and have at least two long conversations
  1 to 2 hours

Done when: You've had a 15-minute practice conversation with your teacher or a fluent signer

Nov 15–21
Week 51

Last practice week

The finish

- [ ] [ ] ASL class: carry on with your course, and ask your teacher what you should work on most
  2 hours
- [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] At home: do the final level check in the guide with a classmate or fluent signer as a practice run, then work on what was hardest
  20 min
- [ ] [ ] [ ] [ ] Fingerspelling and numbers: a last run through everything
  10 min

Done when: You've done a practice run of the final check and know what you'll talk about

Nov 22–28
Week 52

A real conversation in ASL

The finish

- [ ] ASL class: carry on with your course, and tell your teacher about Saturday's final conversation; ask them to help you arrange it if you haven't yet
  2 hours
- [ ] At home: read the final level check in the guide, then film yourself telling one story you want to share
  20 min
- [ ] Fingerspelling: a relaxed run through names you'll need
  10 min
- [ ] Final check: a 20-minute conversation with a Deaf signer, at an event or with someone you've met, about your life, your plans and something in the news. Stay in ASL the whole time
  1 to 2 hours

Done when: You've held a 20-minute conversation with a Deaf signer about your life, your plans and something in the news, asking for repeats in ASL when you needed them

How the plan works

This plan is for American Sign Language (ASL), the sign language of Deaf communities in the United States and much of Canada. If you live in the UK, you need British Sign Language (BSL) instead: see "Learning BSL in the UK" below.

About six hours a week, with a class at the centre. You can't learn a signed language from a book or a screen on your own, so every week is built around a class with a teacher, then practice at home, then time with Deaf signers.

▪ An ASL class (two sessions of 2 hours, Tuesday and Thursday). Northern Virginia Community College's first-semester ASL course, ASL 101, meets 4 hours a week, so the plan uses the same pace. If your class meets once a week for 2 hours, use the second session for a practice group, a signing night run by a Deaf organisation, or a meet-up with a classmate. Each week names a topic. Your class gives you the signs. If it runs in a different order, follow your class and use the plan for the practice and the events.

▪ Practice at home (30 minutes, four days a week). Twenty minutes on the week's topic, signing to a mirror or filming yourself, and ten minutes on fingerspelling and numbers.

▪ A Deaf event (about once a month, and more often near the end). A Deaf social, an ASL night, or an event at a Deaf club or a school for the Deaf, where ASL is the main language.

Every fourth week from week 7 is a review week: your class carries on, but at home you add no new signs and go back over the last few weeks. If your date is closer than the full plan, the plan leaves some of those out. The level checks and the last weeks always stay.

Each week has a "done when". Tick it, then move on. If you can't yet, repeat the week at home while your class carries on.

Why video alone isn't enough

Videos are useful for going over what you learned in class. They can't be your teacher.

▪ ASL lives in your hands, face and body at once. The National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders (NIDCD) explains that English speakers ask a question by raising the pitch of their voice, while ASL users raise their eyebrows, widen their eyes and tilt their body forward. The National

Association of the Deaf (NAD) says that signing without facial expressions or body movements can give a mixed message, confuse people or be misunderstood. A teacher who can see you will catch this; a video can't.

- You need people to sign with. The NAD's first advice is to start with a sign language class, and then to practise with people who are deaf or hard of hearing and know ASL. It says people who know ASL are generally patient with new signers and will slow down and repeat for you.
- Classes send learners out into the community. The University of Minnesota asks every student in every one of its ASL courses to go to at least one ASL or Deaf community event, says that being surrounded by native users can't be replicated in a classroom, and strongly encourages going to or volunteering at many more.

So this plan treats video as practice between classes, and treats your class and your time with Deaf signers as the heart of it.

ASL, BSL and other sign languages

Sign languages aren't universal, and they don't follow the spoken language of the country. The NIDCD says British Sign Language (BSL) is a different language from ASL, and that Americans who know ASL may not understand BSL. The NAD says each country has its own sign language, and that ASL itself has regional signs, like accents.

- In the United States and much of English-speaking Canada, learn ASL. This plan is for you.
- In Quebec and many French-speaking Deaf communities in Canada, the language is Langue des signes québécoise (LSQ), a different language. The plan's shape works with an LSQ class, but its signs and examples are ASL.
- In the UK, learn BSL. See "Learning BSL in the UK" below. Northern Ireland has two sign languages, BSL and Irish Sign Language (ISL), so ask a local Deaf organisation which one is used where you live.
- Elsewhere, look for your own country's Deaf association: it will tell you which sign language Deaf people use where you live.

Learn the language of the Deaf people near you. That's who you'll be signing with.

How long it really takes

The NAD says learning enough signs for basic communication, and signing them comfortably, can take a year or more. It also says everyone learns sign language at their own speed, so don't be discouraged if you're slower than someone else in your class.

This plan is about 300 hours over 52 weeks (4 hours of class and 2 hours of home practice a week, plus events). That number is the plan's own choice, built around a college course's 4 hours a week. Classes vary: if yours meets less often, choose a later date.

The "I know the alphabet and some signs" level is 40 weeks, because it skips the first twelve weeks. Its first week checks what you already know.

The finish line is a 20-minute everyday conversation with a Deaf signer, not fluency. Fluency takes years of using ASL with Deaf people.

Which level to pick

- I'm starting from zero: you don't know the manual alphabet, or only a few signs. 52 weeks.
- I know the alphabet and some signs: you can fingerspell your name, sign numbers to 20 or more, and ask and answer simple questions about yourself and your family, perhaps from a first class or from family or friends. 40 weeks, starting with a check-in week and joining the full plan at week 14.

If you're between the two, start at zero: the first weeks go quickly if you know them, and they're where small habits in your handshapes and face get fixed. If you taught yourself from videos, ask a teacher to watch you in your first week, whichever level you choose.

Level checks

The ASL Proficiency Interview (ASLPI), run by Gallaudet University, rates signers from 0 to 5, and the University of Minnesota says a 4, 4+ or 5 counts as near-native or native signing. The checks below use Gallaudet's descriptions as a guide. They are the plan's own checks, not the ASLPI.

▪ First check, week 16 (week 4 if you know some signs): fingerspell your full name and address, read back ten fingerspelled names, sign numbers to 100, and hold a five-minute conversation about yourself, your family and your work. Gallaudet's level 0 describes someone who, given time and familiar cues, can exchange greetings, give limited background information and name familiar things around them. You're aiming to be comfortable here.

▪ Second check, week 32 (week 20): a ten-minute conversation about your routine, directions to a place near you and your plans. Gallaudet describes level 1 as conversation restricted to some concrete exchanges and predictable topics needed to get by.

▪ Final check, week 52 (week 40): a 20-minute conversation with a Deaf signer about your life, your plans and something in the news, asking for repeats in ASL when you need them. Gallaudet's level 2 describes signers who can talk about concrete, familiar topics such as current events, work, family and their own life with some confidence. Getting towards that in your first year is a good result.

For an official rating, Gallaudet runs the ASLPI itself. The University of Minnesota suggests taking it once you've finished all of its ASL levels.

Before you start

▪ Find a class, taught by a Deaf teacher if you can. The NAD lists community colleges, universities, libraries, churches and organisations and clubs of the deaf as places to find one, along with state schools for the Deaf, community centres for the Deaf and its state association affiliates. In Canada, the Canadian Association of the Deaf (CAD-ASC) and your province's Deaf organisations are good places to ask. A Deaf teacher teaches the language as their own, and the culture with it.

▪ Find your nearest Deaf events. Ask your teacher, your state or provincial Deaf association, or a school for the Deaf. Look for events where ASL is the main language and most people there are Deaf.

▪ Set up a mirror and a phone stand. You'll sign to the mirror and film yourself. You don't need anything else.

▪ Pick your times. Your class days, then four short practice sessions on other days.

▪ If you have a hearing loss yourself, or a deaf child, Deaf organisations can point you to support made for you. The NAD says parents of a newly identified deaf or hard of hearing child can ask their child's early intervention system for ASL instruction.

Deaf culture and respect

Learning ASL means being welcomed into a community's language. A few things to know from the start:

▪ Deaf with a capital D. The Canadian Association of the Deaf describes "Deaf" as a sociological term for people who are medically deaf or hard of hearing and who identify with and take part in the culture, society and language of Deaf people, based on sign language. It says using the right words shows respect for the differences between Deaf, deafened and hard of hearing people.

▪ Don't say "hearing impaired" about Deaf people. The CAD-ASC says the term isn't acceptable for people with a hearing loss and should never be used about Deaf people. "Deaf" and "hard of hearing" are the words to use.

▪ Don't invent signs. The NAD says that when there's no sign for a word, you shouldn't make one up: it may break ASL's grammar, or be offensive without your meaning it to be. Fingerspell it, and ask.

▪ Ask Deaf people for signs, not lessons. At events you're a guest. Chat, ask for a sign when you need one, and leave the teaching to your teacher.

▪ Stay in ASL. At Deaf events, don't talk among hearing friends in spoken English. It shuts people out.

▪ Learn the history. The "Deaf culture and history" week asks you to read or watch something on Deaf history made by Deaf people. Keep going after that.

Fingerspelling, numbers and your face

These three come first in the plan because everything else rests on them.

▪ Fingerspelling. The NIDCD says fingerspelling is part of ASL, used to spell out English words: names, places and words with no sign. Learn it in week 1 and practise it a little every week. Reading someone else's fingerspelling is harder than doing it yourself, so from week 6 you practise both ways.

▪ Numbers. ASL numbers have their own handshapes and rules, which your teacher will show you. Ages, times, prices and phone numbers all come up early.

▪ Your face. Your eyebrows show a question, and your face shows how big, how much and how you feel. Practise in a mirror until it feels normal.

Clear beats fast. The NAD says speed isn't crucial in sign language: it's more important to sign clearly, even slowly. If people often ask you to repeat yourself, slow down.

Learning BSL in the UK

British Sign Language is a different language from ASL, so in the UK learn BSL instead. The plan's shape (a class at the centre, short practice at home, time with Deaf signers, regular checks) works just as well. Its signs and examples are ASL, so follow your BSL course for the content.

▪ The British Deaf Association (BDA) is the UK's national Deaf charity. It says most of its staff are Deaf and all are BSL users. BSL was recognised in law in 2022, and the BDA runs Sign Language Week each year to celebrate and promote BSL. Its website is a good place to start.

▪ Signature's BSL qualifications run from Level 1 up to Level 6. Signature, a registered charity, is the awarding body. It says BSL Level 1 takes about 90 hours in all, made up of 64 guided learning hours with a teacher and 26 hours of study of your own, and that courses are usually taught weekly, in person or online. Level 1 is assessed through three assessments during the course.

▪ Choose a Deaf-led class. Ask the BDA or your local Deaf club where Deaf teachers teach in your area.

For BSL, use the "I'm starting from zero" level of this plan as a weekly rhythm alongside your Level 1 course, and do your checks with your teacher's assessments. Level 1's 64 guided hours usually take fewer weeks than this plan's 52, so when it ends, carry on with a Level 2 course.

Common mistakes

▪ Learning only from videos. Use video between classes. Your class and Deaf signers are where you learn.

▪ Keeping a still face. Your face is part of the grammar. Practise in a mirror.

▪ Signing fast to look fluent. Clear beats fast. Slow down when people ask you to repeat.

▪ Making up signs. Fingerspell and ask.

▪ Waiting until you're "good enough" for a Deaf event. Go from week 6. Watching counts, and people expect learners.

▪ Practising only the signing, not the watching. Reading other people's signing and fingerspelling is the harder half. Practise it every week.

▪ Signing in English word order. ASL has its own grammar. Follow your teacher's sentences, not a word-for-word translation.

▪ Learning the wrong sign language. Learn the one Deaf people use where you live.

Your final conversation, and after

For the final conversation, choose a Deaf signer you've met at events, or ask your teacher to introduce you to someone. Tell them it's a milestone for you, and ask them to sign as they normally would. Bring five

topics: your life, your work, your family, a story and something in the news. When you miss something, ask in ASL for them to sign it again. Afterwards, write down three things you wished you could say, and take them to class.

After the plan, keep going to class (ASL 2 and 3, or your community's next level) and to Deaf events. Use ASL every week, or it fades. If you'd like to give your time to a Deaf organisation, see the Volunteer plan. For learning any language, see the Learn a new language plan.

If you fall behind

Missed 1 week: Carry on with the current week and your class. Start your next practice with a quick run through fingerspelling and numbers.

Missed 2 weeks: Repeat the last week you finished in full at home, while your class carries on. If that runs past your date, the plan leaves out a review week, never the level checks or the last weeks.

Missed 3 weeks: Go back two weeks from where you stopped, and ask your teacher what you've missed in class. Go to the next Deaf event even if you feel rusty. If there are no longer enough weeks, enter a new date on the plan page.

Missed 6 or more weeks: Read the level checks in the guide and find the week that matches what you can do today (a five-minute conversation with your teacher will tell you). If you've missed several classes, ask whether you should rejoin at an earlier level. Then enter a new date on the plan page.

Sources

National Association of the Deaf (NAD)
`https://nad.org/knowledge-hub/american-sign-language/learning-american-sign-language/`
“To learn enough signs for basic communication and to sign them comfortably, can take a year or more.”

National Association of the Deaf (NAD)
`https://nad.org/knowledge-hub/american-sign-language/learning-american-sign-language/`
“You can start learning ASL by attending a sign language class.”

National Association of the Deaf (NAD)
`https://nad.org/knowledge-hub/american-sign-language/learning-american-sign-language/`
“You can also expand your knowledge of ASL by practicing your signs with people who are deaf or hard of hearing and also know ASL.”

National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders (NIDCD), U.S. National Institutes of Health
`https://www.nidcd.nih.gov/health/american-sign-language`
“For example, British Sign Language (BSL) is a different language from ASL, and Americans who know ASL may not understand BSL.”

National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders (NIDCD), U.S. National Institutes of Health
`https://www.nidcd.nih.gov/health/american-sign-language`
“For example, English speakers may ask a question by raising the pitch of their voices and by adjusting word order; ASL users ask a question by raising their eyebrows, widening their eyes, and tilting their bodies forward.”

National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders (NIDCD), U.S. National Institutes of Health
`https://www.nidcd.nih.gov/health/american-sign-language`
“Fingerspelling is part of ASL and is used to spell out English words.”

Gallaudet University, ASL Proficiency Interview (archived copy, Internet Archive)
https://web.archive.org/web/20260314054906/https://gallaudet.edu/american-sign-language-proficiency-interview-aslpi/aslpi-preparation/aslpi-proficiency-levels/
“Given adequate time and familiar cues, they may be able to exchange greetings, provide limited background information, and identify a number of familiar objects from their immediate environment.”

Gallaudet University, ASL Proficiency Interview (archived copy, Internet Archive)
https://web.archive.org/web/20260314054906/https://gallaudet.edu/american-sign-language-proficiency-interview-aslpi/aslpi-preparation/aslpi-proficiency-levels/
“Conversation is restricted to some concrete exchanges and predictable topics necessary for survival.”

Gallaudet University, ASL Proficiency Interview (archived copy, Internet Archive)
https://web.archive.org/web/20260314054906/https://gallaudet.edu/american-sign-language-proficiency-interview-aslpi/aslpi-preparation/aslpi-proficiency-levels/
“They demonstrate the ability to elaborate on concrete and familiar topics (e.g., current events, work, family, autobiographical) with some confidence.”

American Sign Language Program, Department of Educational Psychology, University of Minnesota
https://edpsych.umn.edu/current-students/asl
“All ASL courses require students to attend a minimum of one ASL/Deaf community event.”

American Sign Language Program, Department of Educational Psychology, University of Minnesota
https://edpsych.umn.edu/current-students/asl
“This experience cannot be replicated in the classroom.”

American Sign Language Program, Department of Educational Psychology, University of Minnesota
https://edpsych.umn.edu/current-students/asl
“To build your language and community skills, attending or volunteering at a number of events is strongly encouraged.”

Northern Virginia Community College
https://www.nvcc.edu/courses/asl/asl101.html
“ASL 101 introduces students to both the practical elements of producing and comprehending American Sign Language (ASL) in common discourse while gaining an awareness of the culture, heritage, and civic values of the U.S. Deaf community.”

Northern Virginia Community College
https://www.nvcc.edu/courses/asl/asl101.html
“Total 4 hours per week.”

Signature (CACDP), UK awarding body for BSL qualifications
https://www.signature.org.uk/qualifications/british-sign-language-qualifications/british-sign-language-level-1-certificate/
“In total, it should take you 90 hours to complete the qualification’s three units included.”

Signature (CACDP), UK awarding body for BSL qualifications
https://www.signature.org.uk/qualifications/british-sign-language-qualifications/british-sign-language-level-1-certificate/
“These 90 hours will be made up of 64 guided learning hours and 26 additional study hours.”

Signature (CACDP), UK awarding body for BSL qualifications
https://www.signature.org.uk/qualifications/british-sign-language-qualifications/british-sign-language-level-1-certificate/
“Courses are typically taught weekly, either in-person or online.”

Canadian Association of the Deaf - Association des Sourds du Canada (CAD-ASC)
https://cad-asc.ca/issues-positions/terminology/

“A sociological term referring to those individuals who are medically deaf or hard of hearing who identify with and participate in the culture, society, and language of Deaf people, which is based on Sign language.”

Canadian Association of the Deaf - Association des Sourds du Canada (CAD-ASC)
`https://cad-asc.ca/issues-positions/terminology/`
“Using the proper terminology shows respect for their differences.”

Canadian Association of the Deaf - Association des Sourds du Canada (CAD-ASC)
`https://cad-asc.ca/issues-positions/terminology/`
““Hearing impaired” is a medical condition; it is not a collective noun for people who have varying degrees of hearing loss.”

British Deaf Association
`https://bda.org.uk/news-release-introduce-bsl/`
“The British Deaf Association (BDA) today launched the first national Sign Language Week campaign since the legal recognition of British Sign Language in 2022.”

British Deaf Association
`https://bda.org.uk/news-release-introduce-bsl/`
“Sign Language Week, which will run from 13 – 19 March 2023, is an annual campaign coordinated by the BDA which aims to celebrate and promote BSL across the UK and to protect and preserve the endangered language for future generations.”

British Deaf Association
`https://bda.org.uk/news-release-introduce-bsl/`
“The majority of our staff at the BDA are Deaf and all are BSL users.”

Department for Communities, Northern Ireland
`https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/topics/sign-language`
“Northern Ireland has two signed languages - British Sign Language (BSL) and Irish Sign Language (ISL).”

This plan online	`https://goaltodo.com/learn-sign-language`
Reach it with others on Welang	`https://welang.com/goals`
Reach it on your own in HourLife	`https://www.hourlife.com`