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Introduction to “Basic American Sign language”

I want to start by thanking you for considering using this book to learn American Sign Language (ASL). We contrived this book because we were frustrated that there were no curriculums designed for a short, weekly ASL class (as is the case in most churches). We decided, therefore, to make a 16 week curriculum to teach basic ASL in our church. We made this curriculum with the mindset that a weekly class is not sufficient to learn ASL and that the only way to truly learn a language is to interact with Deaf people. With those beliefs, we put together a curriculum that will give the students all the tools they need to start communicating with the Deaf as quickly as possible.

You will notice that this curriculum differs from other curriculums in a few key areas. First, there are a lot of words that normally are included in beginning ASL classes that we purposefully did not include. Signs such as the days of the week and colors were left out so that the student can learn to converse with deaf people and ask for those signs later, when he or she may need them. Secondly, our lessons are short. We believe that “less is more” and designed our lessons around that idea, rather than a “shotgun” approach to these lessons. If you are a teacher, and are concerned about not having enough information to teach in your available time, I encourage you to use the time would have spent teaching more material to make the lessons your own. For example, you could use your extra time to review past lessons, sign a verse of the week, or to give a devotion.

I would be remiss if I did not thank the people who made these lessons possible. A special thank you to my church, Crossroads, for making this possible. I also need to thank Arla and her family for being instrumental in planning this book as well as making the practice sentences, Steve for his feedback, Shannon for his feedback, Joe for his advice, and Michele, who not only helped us plan the book, but took the pictures as well.

Sincerely,

Cody
Lesson 1
Finger Spelling, Numbers, and Greetings

My Name

Hello / Hi / Bye

Phone Number
Finger Spelling Tips

- Focus on clarity, not speed.

- PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE!!

- When watching finger spelling, focus on letter combinations, not individual letters.

- If you missed something, just ask!

- Letters stay in one place unless it’s a double letter.

- If you are struggling to keep your letters in place, place your non-dominant hand on your elbow.

Lesson 1: Practice

1. Practice alphabet

2. Practice numbers

3. My phone number is ________________.

4. Goodbye.

5. Hello, my name is ________________.
Lesson 2
Vocabulary

Yes

No

Good
Bad

How

Pronouns (I, Me, He, She, It, They, Them)
Which

Practice Sentences

1. How are you?

2. She is deaf.

3. Are you deaf or hearing?

4. He is hearing.

5. Hello, my name is ___________________.

8
Lesson 3
Vocabulary

Please

Thank You

You're Welcome
Possessive Pronouns (My, Mine, Yours, His, Hers, Its, Theirs)

What

Son
Daughter

Mom

Dad
Practice Sentences

1. My son is six years old.

2. What is your daughter’s name?

3. Thank you, mom and dad.

4. Their dad’s name is Brian.

5. Hello, my name is ____________________.
Lesson 4
Vocabulary

Who

Where

Here
There

Home

School
Church

Live

Work
Friend

Practice Sentences

1. My mom lives here.

2. What is the name of your church?

3. Who is your friend?

4. My church is over there.

5. Hello, my name is ________________.
Lesson 5
Vocabulary

Slow

Again

Excuse Me
Mean

Have

Want
Annoy

Practice Sentences
1. Excuse me, please.

2. Do you have a job?

3. What do you mean?

4. He annoys me!

5. Hello, my name is ____________________.
Lesson 6
Vocabulary

Okay

Right / Correct

Wrong
True

Understand

Already / Finish
Not Yet / Late/ Have Not/ Haven’t

When

Today
Tomorrow

Practice Sentences

1. When is church?
   2. My mom is right.
   3. Madison will be home tomorrow.
   4. I’m okay.
   5. Hello, my name is ____________________.
Lesson 7
Vocabulary

See

Later

People
How Many

Children

Aunt
Uncle

Boy

Girl
“Oh I See” / Uh huh

Practice Sentences

1. How many children do you have?
2. My uncle lives there.
3. My aunt has three daughters.
4. See you later!
5. Hello, my name is ____________________.
Lesson 8
Vocabulary

Bathroom

Restaurant

Soon
Food / Eat

Water

Don’t Know
City

Hungry

Don't Like
Don’t Want

Practice Sentences
1. Where is the bathroom?

2. That restaurant has good food.

3. I don’t know your name.

4. I don’t want water.

5. Hello, my name is ___________________. 
Lesson 9
Vocabulary

Feel

Sick

Tired
Will

Won’t / Refuse

Not
Happy

Birthday

Help
Practice Sentences

1. I feel sick today.

2. Tomorrow I’m going to be tired.

3. Happy birthday!

4. Sunny refuses to eat.

5. Hello, my name is ____________________.
Lesson 10
Vocabulary

Nice

Meet

I Love You
Sorry

“Hey” (Bump)

Do / Action
Do You Mind

Ready

Time
Practice Sentences

1. It's nice to meet you!

2. Erin is not ready.

3. What time is it?

4. I haven't met Adam yet.

5. Hello, my name is ____________________.
Lesson 11
Signing Space and Grammar

**Signing Space** - the area which a signer makes most of his/her signs.

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**DISCLAIMER**: As with any language, there are always exceptions to the rules! These grammar rules are not exhaustive or take exceptions into account. They are meant to be a framework so that you can learn how to use the language.

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Structure of ASL is “**Topic-Comment**”

**Description**: In English, we put the describing word before the thing we are describing (*White House* or *Nice Man*). ASL does the opposite.

**Examples**:

*English*: The *White* House  
*ASL*: HOUSE WHITE

*English*: The *nice* man  
*ASL*: MAN NICE

ASL uses **Time Markers**, at the beginning of a sentence, while relating a series of events that have, are, or will happen, to show tense.

**Description**: In English, we add a suffix or use a helping verb to show tense, as in the examples below. ASL adds a sign at the beginning of the thought to show when that event happened.

**Examples**:

*English*: My son *left* the house. Now he *is coming* back.  
*ASL*: FINISH SON LEAVE HOUSE. NOW HE COME.
English: I heard about the old man. I will see the man.
ASL: FINISH HEAR ABOUT MAN OLD. WILL MYSELF SEE HIM.

Examples of time markers are signs like YESTERDAY, TODAY, TOMORROW, WILL, and FINISH.

ASL puts WH- question words at the end on a sentence.

Description: In English WH- questions (who, what, when, where, why, and which) can go at the beginning or the end of a sentence depending on the sentence’s structure. In ASL, the WH- questions go at the end of a sentence.

Examples:

   English: When did you go to the house?
   ASL: HOUSE YOU-GO WHEN?

   English: Where did you go last night?
   ASL: LAST NIGHT YOU-GO WHERE?

How would these English sentences be structured in ASL?

- I went to the big city.
- I am going to the city tomorrow.
- I was already there.
- Where was my uncle?
- When was my aunt there?
Lesson 12
Directional Signs

**Directional Signs** - Signs that can show who is doing the action to whom.

**Examples of directional signs:**

- **Help**
- **Give**
Tease

Show

Bother

How would you sign these sentences?

- Please help me tomorrow.
- Help her tomorrow.
- I helped you yesterday.
- Give me the phone.
- Give him the phone.
- I will give you the phone.
Lesson 13
Classifiers

**Classifiers** - Hand shapes that represent something.

**Tips for Classifiers:**

1. **You must set up what the classifier represents before establishing a classifier.** As an example, if you sign “MY FRIEND” and then making a ONE, that would mean the handshape represents your friend.
2. **ANYTHING can be a classifier.** Be creative and use your imagination.
3. **Don’t get discouraged or overwhelmed.** Classifiers are one of those things you will never fully figure out. Just use what you know and learn as you go.

**Common Classifiers:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>One</th>
<th>Side Three</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image1.png" alt="One Handshape" /></td>
<td><img src="image2.png" alt="Side Three Handshape" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Any alphabet letter can be a classifier.

How would you represent these with classifiers?

- A book opening up.
- A car getting washed.
- A clock’s hands moving.
- A flashlight with the battery dying.
- A dog chasing a mail man.
- A dog catching a mail man.
Lesson 14
Miscellaneous ASL Features

Adding an “-ER”
To change an action sign into the person doing the action, simply add the “-ER” sign (this is also a sign for “PERSON”).

Example:
Feeler= FEEL-PERSON

Warning: It is a common mistake to think this sign adds “-ER” to any sign. This is not true; it only makes a verb into the person or thing doing the verb. In other words, NEAR does not become NEARER, but TEACH can become TEACHER.

Negation
To negate something in ASL, the signer only needs to shake his or her head “NO”.

Examples:
English: Don’t Go.
ASL: GO (with NO head shake)

English: Don’t run.
ASL: GO (with NO head shake)
Numbered Time
ASL can incorporate the number and a time marker into one sign (Up to the Number NINE). Here are only a couple of examples.

One Day

Three Days

One Minute/Second
Sign these sentences.

- In five days, I need to see the teacher.
- In nine minutes, I need to go to the city.
- My helper is two days late.
- My helper is not six minutes late.
- I don’t need to see the teacher in three minutes.
**Non-Manual Markers** - (NMM) Facial expressions that carry meaning in ASL.

Non-Manual Markers convey a lot of information in ASL. The following list is not a complete list, but will serve as a starting area.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Non-Manual Marker</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>Picture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CHA</td>
<td>Large</td>
<td><img src="image1.png" alt="Image" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OOO</td>
<td>Small</td>
<td><img src="image2.png" alt="Image" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PFFFT  |  Sloppily

Raised Eyebrow and Lean Forward  |  Question

Other Non-Manual Markers:

- MMMMMM - Uh-huh
- PAH - Success
- LALALA - Shows far distance or long duration.
- FOR-FOR - What for?
- Shake Head No - Negates a statement
- FSH - Finish

What signs have you already learned that you can change with Non-Manual Markers? Can you come up with three?
Lesson 16
ASL Idioms

ASL, like any other language, has its own expressions which do not literally translate into English. Here is a list of some of the more common expressions.

TRAIN GONE    You Missed It

FUNNY NONE    Not Funny

SWALLOW FISH  Hook Line and Sinker
Other ASL Idioms:

- I-I-I-I- All about ME ME ME
- **FINISH TOUCH**- Been to a place
Additional Resources

www.ASLPro.com - ASL Pro, Online Sign Language Dictionary


www.LifePrint.com/dictionary.htm - Life Print, Online ASL Dictionary

www.ASL.ms - Online Fingerspelling Practice