



How to...

DID YOU KNOW?
The first public school for deaf students opened in 1775 in Paris, France.



A girl signs "I love you."

Learn sign language

Communicate with the visual language of the Deaf.

American Sign Language (ASL) is a visual language of the Deaf that uses body, hand, and face movements (known as signs) instead of spoken words. ASL is one of the most popular languages in the US, and about one million people use it as their primary way to communicate. If you'd like to try learning some of the language, here's how to get started.

Find out about ASL

Just like with spoken languages, sign languages are unique to different countries and regions. There are about 137 different sign languages around the world. ASL is thought to have originated more than 200 years ago and is now used mostly by people living in the US and some parts of Canada. ASL has its own grammar system that's entirely different from English and from other sign languages. If an American person who signs using ASL traveled to Italy and met an Italian person who signs, they might have trouble understanding each other.

Research different resources

There are many websites and online videos you can use to learn about ASL. Two YouTube channels to start with are ASL Meredith at [tinyurl.com/TWJUS-Meredith](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC1WJUS-Meredith) and ASL Nook at [tinyurl.com/TWJUS-Nook](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC1WJUS-Nook).

The ASL Meredith channel has lessons on everything from sports lingo to Halloween words. The website Signing Savvy at [tinyurl.com/TWJUS-Sign](https://www.signingsavvy.com/TWJUS-Sign) has a sign language dictionary that is easy to search.

Begin with the alphabet

You could start out by signing the alphabet, says Dr. Byron W. Bridges, an ASL educator and author. Once you know the letters in your name, you can fingerspell it. Fingerspelling means you spell out each letter of a word with its sign. After the ABCs, learn some numbers. Challenge yourself to count from 1 to 100. Next, try to learn simple phrases, like "I'm hungry" or "How was school?" It can also be fun to learn to sign the words in a favorite song or a children's picture book, suggests Tara Adams, a sign language instructor at ASL Expressions in Boise, Idaho.

Practice with others

Although video tutorials are great, the best way to learn a language is to use it. If you know people who sign, ask if they will practice with you. If you don't, ask friends if they would like to learn ASL with you. It's also important to get involved in the Deaf community. You could support a local Deaf school's fundraising efforts or attend ASL events virtually or in your area.



The letter R in ASL

4 simple ASL signs you can learn first

These beginner signs are so common, you might already know some of them.

Hello

With fingers up, cross your thumb in front of



your palm. Put your hand in front of your ear, by your face. Extend your hand outward, like a salute. Smile as you do it. Emotional signs, like hello, are communicated as much by body language as by the sign.

Yes

Make your hand into a fist. Hold it at about shoulder height and bend your wrist up and down a few times.



The idea is that your fist represents you shaking your head yes.

Friend

Hold each index finger in



a C-shape and hook them together. Reverse the position of them and do it again. It's like your fingers are giving each other a hug.

I love you

Hold your thumb, pointer finger, and pinky finger up while keeping your ring finger and middle finger down.

