Historically there was no written form for American Sign Language. Transposing a three-dimensional language that uses space, non-manual signals, and motion as its primary characteristics onto paper is a daunting challenge. Only recently with the advent of SignWriting™ has ASL become a written language, though this system has not yet gained acceptance with most signers. Because ASL is not written, Deaf people have relied on the written formats of the spoken languages used around them. Thus, a Deaf person in the United States signs in ASL but writes in English, and depending on where he or she lives, a Deaf Canadian may sign in ASL and / or LSQ (Quebec Sign Language) and write both English and French. Over the years a written system has been developed by ASL teachers and researchers to translate signs into a basic form of English. Using one language to write another has its limitations but doing so can be a quick way to convey concepts. This system is called glossing ASL. Knowing how to gloss is not a requirement for learning ASL, but it can be a handy tool if you plan on continuing your ASL studies. An example of this system is shown below, followed by explanations of how to gloss ASL.

### How to Gloss ASL

1. Every sign has one gloss. The English word and ASL gloss may not match exactly. See your glossary. Each gloss is always written in capitalized letters.
   Example: TOMORROW

2. Using the index finger to point to a person or thing is called deixis. Abbreviate this with IX, and follow with another gloss or name of the person to whom you are pointing. You can also add he, she, or it in lower-case letters after IX, but add a hyphen if you do this.
   Example: IX (or IX-he)
   Example: IX MAN

3. Fingerspelled words are preceded by fs-. Capitalize the fingerspelled term but not the fs-.
   Example: fs-BUS

4. Many signs can’t be glossed using just one English word. Use hyphens between each segment to show a single concept.
   Example: GIVE-ME

5. Glossing classifiers requires two parts. Gloss the classifier with CL: and then add the concept described by the classifier in English.
   Example: CL: Bent V
   “person sitting down”
When there are two or more parts to a single sign, use a + between each.
Example: SUN+SHINE

Possessive signs like his, hers, its, and theirs are preceded by POSS. Add who is referred to in italics.
Example: POSS-hers

Non-manual signals formed by the eyebrows, head, and lips must be included. First, draw a line above the glossed sentence. Specific descriptions for the non-manual signal are written above the glossed term that uses the NMS.
Example: ME DON'T-KNOW

When the same NMS is used throughout a sentence, such as the WH-Face or the Question-Maker, write the NMS at the beginning and end of the sentence.
Example: YOU NAME WHAT YOU

Raising the eyebrows to ask a yes / no question is written with a q over the gloss.
Example: q YOU

Write above the gloss the word mouthed by the lips for signs that have non-manual signals attached to them.
Example: cha CL: Claw

Use the ++ symbol for signs that are repeated or to show a recurring action.
Example: MEET-MANY-PEOPLE++

WH questions are shown by writing whq over the gloss.
Example: WHERE

Specific facial expressions or other non-manual signals are written over the corresponding gloss.
Example: FACIAL-EXPRESSION

**Glossing Tips**

- Approach glossing as a labeling exercise: Label only what is signed and corresponding non-manual signals. Avoid adding English words that are not signed, like is and are.
- The gloss for each sign is found in the Glossing Index at the back of this book. Some signs can be translated into English different ways, but there is only one gloss for each sign.
- Glossed phrases and sentences should be accompanied with non-manual signals.
- Refer to the Glossary section to find exact glosses for vocabulary.
- When handwriting gloss, it is better to use print letters rather than cursive. Substitute cursive for italics where necessary.
1. *One-word glosses.* Follow the examples to gloss each sign correctly.

**Examples**

- **1.** ME
- **2.** BUSY

2. **English Glosses**

   - SIGN-LANGUAGE
   - WHAT’S-UP
   - DON’T-LIKE
   - LOOK-AT-ME
   - DON’T-KNOW
   - BLANK-FACE
   - SAME-OLD
   - ME-TOO
   - GO-TO
   - HOLD-ON
   - TAKE-CARE
Glossing deixis. Any time you point to a person or object, your index finger is glossed as IX, unless signing me, you or they. Sometimes other signs or a fingerspelled name follows deixis, but there may be instances when this information is not available. Unless given specific details, do not gloss deixis as he, she, or it. When the gender of a person referred to by IX is known, add -he, -she, or -it to the gloss. Follow the example below to write each signed phrase or sentence in ASL gloss and English.

**Example**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ASL Gloss:</th>
<th>English:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IX fs-CHRIS IX.</td>
<td>He is Chris. / She is Chris.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. IX fs-CHRIS IX.
2. IX fs-CHRIS IX.
3. IX fs-CHRIS IX.
4. IX fs-CHRIS IX.
5. IX fs-CHRIS IX.
6. IX fs-CHRIS IX.

Gloss completion. Complete the ASL glosses for each sign.

1. fs-
2. WHAT'S-
3. HOME+
4. DON'T-
Non-manual signals. Glossing is incomplete until facial expressions and other non-manual signals are included in the gloss. When adding non-manual signals, focus on what you do with your eyebrows, lips, facial expressions, and head while signing. These actions are added above the gloss. For now, focus only on adding head nod, head shake, Question-Maker eyebrows, smile and frown labels. Follow the examples to complete the gloss of each sign below.

**Examples**

NMS Labels:
1. smile
2. frown
3. head shake
4. head nod
5. q (Question-Maker)

**Gloss:** NICE ME-MEET YOU

**NMS:** smile smile smile

**Glossed sentence:** smile smile

**English:** Nice to meet you.

1. **DON'T-UNDERSTAND**
2. **DON'T**
3. **HI**
4. **MAD**
5. **QUESTION**
6. **YES**

More deixis. Sign the following glossed sentences in ASL.

- ME NAME fs-SARA IX-he NAME fs-SEAN IX-he.
- IX LEARN SIGN-LANGUAGE IX.
- IX WANT MEET YOU.
- IX LAST NAME fs-COOPER IX.
- fs-MARC DEAF IX-he MY FRIEND IX-he.
- IX-she NAME fs-TARA IX-she.
- IX HARD-OF-HEARING IX.
- IX-he BUSY IX-she.
- IX-she NAME fs-RITA IX-she.
- IX SICK IX.

2. The WH-Face. WH signs like who, where, what, when, and why are always accompanied by the non-manual signal known as the WH-Face. Other signs may also use the WH-Face if used in a WH sentence. Rather than writing WH-Face when glossing, use the abbreviation whq. Gloss the following WH signs after looking at the example.

Example

ASL Gloss:

whq       whq
YOU LEARN fs-ASL WHY

English:

Why are you learning ASL?

3. Using non-manual signals. Gloss each sign or NMS correctly. Write a short glossed sentence that includes the vocabulary sign or non-manual signal.
4. *Glossing directionality.* To gloss directional signs effectively, note the beginning and ending location of the sign. If the sign moves away from the body, the gloss tends to include to or you. If the sign moves towards the body, the gloss may include me or here. Complete the gloss that corresponds to the following directional signs.

**Examples**

- **MOVE-TO**
- **MOVE-HERE**

1. HELP-
2. -ME
3. -ME
4. GIVE-
5. ASK-

5. *Comparisons.* In this exercise, write both glossed and English versions of the ASL sentence, including non-manual signals. Note that *huh* and the Question-Maker NMS are often interpreted into English as “Do you...”
Non-manuals. Insert the appropriate non-manual signals into each glossed sentence.

1. WEEKEND DO-DO YOU

2. YOU fs-CHRIS HUH

3. TURN-OFF-VOICE

4. NO ME-NOT HEARING ME-NOT

5. YOU HUNGRY HUH
1. **Review.** Gloss each sign correctly.

1.  
2.  
3.  
4.  
5.  

2. **Where do you live?** Write the gloss for each sentence. Most states and provinces use a fingerspelled abbreviation, while others have signs. Use the “Places” list as needed. Examples are provided.

**Examples**

1. **English:** I was born in Maine.  
   **Gloss:** ME BORN fs-MAINE ME.

2. **English:** I live in California.  
   **Gloss:** ME LIVE CALIFORNIA ME.

1. **English:** Are you from Tennessee?  
2. **English:** Where were you born?  
3. **English:** They live in British Columbia.  
4. **English:** I live in New Jersey.  
5. **English:** We are from Ohio.  
6. **English:** He grew up in Nevada.

**United States**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alabama</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alaska</td>
<td>ALASKA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>ARIZONA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td>fs-ARK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>CALIFORNIA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>COLOR+fs-ADO</td>
</tr>
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<td>Connecticut</td>
<td>fs-CONN</td>
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<td>fs-DEL</td>
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<tr>
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<td>fs-IOWA</td>
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<td>fs-WISC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wyoming</td>
<td>fs-WYO</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Canada**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alberta</td>
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<tr>
<td>British Columbia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Manitoba</td>
<td>MANITOBA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Brunswick</td>
<td>fs-NB</td>
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<td>Northwest Territories</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nova Scotia</td>
<td>fs-NS</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ontario</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prince Edward Island</td>
<td>fs-PEI</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quebec</td>
<td>QUEBEC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saskatchewan</td>
<td>fs-SASK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yukon</td>
<td>fs-YUKON</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
WH-Q and RH-Q. Two different non-manual signals accompany the sign *why*, depending on how the sign appears in a sentence. When asking a specific question, *why* appears at the end of a sentence along with the WH-Face. However, *why* is also used as a conjunction similar to the word “because” in English, and connects two separate clauses in a signed sentence. This type of *why* is accompanied with the brows up NMS and is glossed as *rh*. Look at the example provided and gloss the following sentences.

**Example**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ASL Sign:</th>
<th>rh nod head</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ASL Gloss:</td>
<td>ME LEARN fs-ASL WHY ME ENJOY ME.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English:</td>
<td>I am learning ASL because I enjoy it.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. ![Signs and gestures](image1)
2. ![Signs and gestures](image2)
3. ![Signs and gestures](image3)
4. **Glossing numbers.** To gloss numbers either alone or in a sentence, write the number rather than spelling it. Look at the examples below and then complete the gloss for each of the following numbers.

**Example 1**

![Image of sign language gesture for number 3]

**Example 2**

![Image of sign language gesture for class having 34 students]

1. 

2. 

3. 

4. 

5. 

6. 

7. 

8. 

9. 

Gloss: **3**

Gloss: **CLASS HAVE 34 STUDENT**
5 More numbers. Gloss the following items correctly.

1. 

2. 

3. 

4. 

5. 

6. Possessives. Most possessive signs have specific glosses, such as my, your, our, and their. However, glossing signs like hers, his, and its requires the addition of POSS-IX unless the gender of the person is known. If it is, then gloss a sign as POSS-his or POSS-hers. Write the following items in both gloss and English formats.

1. 

2. 

3. 

4. 

5. 

POSS-IX