



Creating a Personal Sign Language Dictionary

Sign language is one of many forms of communication, and American Sign Language, or ASL, is one language within sign language. Many non-speaking individuals are taught ASL; however, the signs are sometimes modified. This is especially the case for autistic individuals with fine and gross motor challenges.

The signs a person uses are only beneficial if someone understands them. So, creating a personal sign language dictionary with the specific variations of signs that an individual uses can greatly help bridge communication gaps.

Below you will see two options for creating a personal sign language dictionary: a Video Option and a Traditional Option. Each can be helpful in creating a communication connection for limited or non-speaking individuals and those around them. This personal sign language dictionary can then be shared with anyone who interacts with the individual, like caregivers, teachers, employers, or peers.

Video Option:

Short videos showing each sign



- ▶ Consider some of the most commonly used and most important signs the individual uses.
 - ▶ Find a smartphone or camera that is able to record videos.
 - ▶ Prepare a space to record the video with plenty of light and minimal background noise.
 - ▶ Include the individual in the videos if | possible, or include a person who will most closely replicate the modified sign the individual uses.
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- ▶ Have the person who is signing wear a plain shirt to most clearly see the signs.
 - ▶ With each sign, have a speaking person speak the word aloud. You could also have it written on a piece of paper visible in camera view or edit to add the text in after taking the video.
 - ▶ You can either record one long video with several signs or multiple short videos with one sign per video.
 - If you record one long video, when sharing, you might want to include time markers for each sign for ease of reference. (Example – 0:15 water, 0:30 bathroom, 0:45 yes, 0:50 no)
 - If you record several shorter videos, it is best to include the name of the sign in the file name of the video. Alternatively, you can include a caption or reference key indicating what sign is in each video.
 - ▶ You can also include written notes about specific modifications an individual makes that vary from ASL.
 - ▶ Utilizing a shared drive online (e.g., Google Drive, iCloud drives) or a USB drive can be a good place to store a video sign language dictionary, as they can be easily shared. Keep in mind that shorter videos might be easier to access by text or email than longer videos that require more storage space.



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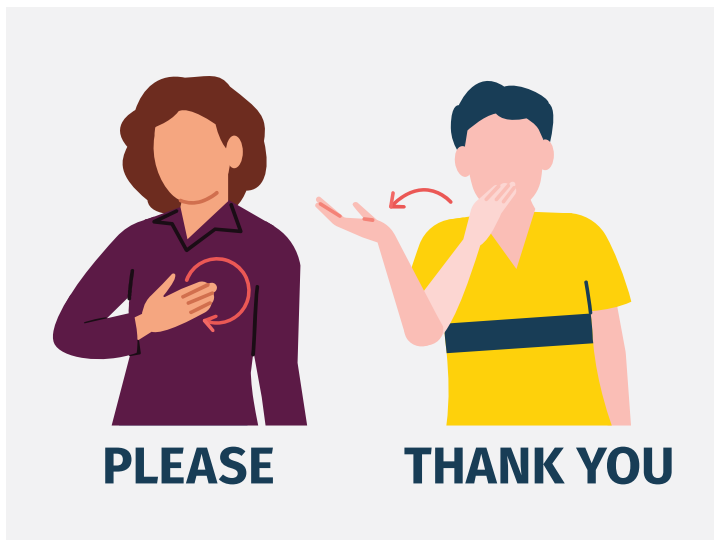


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Traditional Option: Detailed descriptions in writing of each sign



- ▶ Consider some of the most commonly used and most important signs the individual uses.
- ▶ First, you will write the name of the sign.
- ▶ Then, you can write, in as much detail as possible, what the individual does to gesture the sign.
- ▶ It will be helpful to include notes about specific modifications an individual makes that vary from ASL.
- ▶ If possible, include a photo of at least one motion in the sign for reference.

Description of Sign | Tips for writing clear descriptions

When describing the signs and the variations from traditional ASL, it can be helpful to address the 5 parameters of ASL (<https://learnbright.org/5-parameters-of-asl-sign-language-101/>):

- ▶ **Handshape:** the shape you make with your hand when you are signing (e.g., point, “c” shape, closed fist)
 - Back and forth movements
 - Wiggling
- ▶ **Movement:** can be fast or slow, smooth or sharp, straight or curved, left and right, up and down, and more, mostly falling into one of the categories:
 - Moving in a circle
 - Up and down motion
 - Forward
 - Backward
 - Tapping
- ▶ **Location:** where on the body the sign is made
- ▶ **Palm Orientation:** the direction in which the palm of the hand is facing when making a sign (e.g., up, down, left, right, or angled)
- ▶ **Non-Manual Markers (NMM):** additional gestures like facial expressions, such as raised eyebrows, wrinkled nose, open or closed mouth, and the position, direction, and intensity of your eye gaze

*This resource was created in collaboration with Stephanie Dille-Huggins, MA, BCBA.