













Auslan/Sign Language



-  Used to be called 'Deaf Signing', then 'Australian Deaf Sign Language'
-  **Auslan** (Australian Sign Language) coined by Trevor Johnston in the early 80's
-  While Auslan is based on a mixture of British (BSL), Scottish and Irish Sign Languages (ISL) there are also many signs which have naturally arisen to fill lexical gaps. Like many languages generally, both spoken and signed, Auslan has borrowed from American Sign Language (ASL) and others
-  Auslan become **recognised as a community language** in **1987** and confirmed in the government's 'white paper' in 1991. The Federal Government stated the following in its National Languages Policy: "It is now increasingly recognised that signing deaf people constitute a group like any other non-English speaking language group in Australia, with a distinct sub-culture recognised by shared history, social life and sense of identity, united and symbolised by fluency in Auslan, the principal means of communication within the Australian deaf community. Auslan is an indigenous Australian Language". (Commonwealth of Australia 1991).
-  Linguists conducted research - phonology, morphology, syntax, and the use of language
-  Sign language is **not universal** – each country has its own distinctive sign language. Auslan evolved primarily from BSL and ISL
-  **Makaton/Keyword Sign** (often used with children/adults with learning disabilities, intellectual impairment, limited communication ability etc)
-  **Signed English/Total Communication** - represents the vocab and grammar of spoken language using manual signs. It is not a natural language that grows within the community that uses it, but was devised by a committee in the 70s as an exact representation of English in signed form...although many of the signs are drawn from Auslan. The usage often does not reflect the sign's original meaning in Auslan. Signed English uses one sign for each English word. E.g. "run" as in "the girl will run to the shop" is signed the same way as in the sentence "the chairperson will run the meeting" or "she has a run in her stocking." Or rather than sign 'understand', they will sign 'under' and 'stand'. They also add in the '-ed', '-ing', 'un-' etc which are not needed if utilising Auslan correctly.
-  It is **impossible to speak English and sign Auslan** at the same time as they are two different languages with two very different grammatical structures.
-  **Fingerspelling** – used regularly as part of Auslan for English proper nouns, words that have no direct equivalent in Auslan, to emphasise a point, or to hide meaning from an onlooking child (or if the sign is particularly iconic and you do not wish hearing people around you to know what you are talking about). Australia uses a **two-handed alphabet** that has its origins in Britain.
-  **Variation – Region:** regional dialects same as in spoken languages (e.g. togs, swimmers, cozzies, bathers) In Auslan – 2 main dialects – Southern used in VIC, SA, WA and Tas and Northern used in NSW and QLD. Differences for e.g. in car/coffee, 11, blue/blue,

sexy/hungry etc. Some of this variation exists because of schooling (e.g. whether the school was established by the British, Irish, or Scottish). **Gender:** some variation according to gender (e.g. practice). **Age:** technological change brings in new signs; older signers tend to fingerspell more; younger signers tend to incorporate ASL and other sign language more; younger signers tend to have been educated more through Signed English whereas older signers tend to have been educated more using the Rochester Method (emphasis on fingerspelling). **Family Background:** Deaf families tend to use a richer type of sign language with more complex grammar (native signers). Those with English as a first language may use a type of sign language more influenced by English.



Communicating with Deaf People

-  Some of the ways you can communicate with Deaf people include: signing, writing, lipreading, NRS, sms, email, VRS, etc. Just ask the Deaf person how to best communicate with them.

Lipreading

-  Lipreading/Speech Reading...Only about 30% of speech sounds can be seen on the lips alone; the rest are hidden, so lipreading is a lot of guess work, filling in gaps and using the context of the situation to understand what has been said. Some useable hearing helps when lipreading so that what can be heard can be combined with what can be seen on the face to aid understanding.
-  Don't exaggerate or slow or yell speech – it distorts your lip patterns; as much as possible, keep cups, hands, books, paper, beards etc away from the mouth.


Variety in Deaf Community





-  Some deaf people use their voices, and some do not. Most have had years of speech therapy and training, and some have developed clear speech. Many have developed speech that is understandable upon repetition but which is marked with unclear pronunciation or intonation. Some deaf people mouth words without voicing them. Whatever the choice of the individual, use of voice is not an indicator of intelligence or academic standing.
-  There is great variety in the Deaf community... some talk, some don't, some wear hearing aids, others cochlear implants, others none. It is an individual choice. However, signing is one of the core components of belonging in the Deaf community.

Culture:

How Deaf People See Themselves:





Deaf is normal

-  Deaf people do not usually see themselves as disabled or impaired and dislike being referred to as "hearing impaired". They see themselves as "normal Deaf people" not as "people with impaired hearing".

-  Disability is a social construct - The disability they experience is a result of assumptions and barriers that hearing society imposes on them. This view can perhaps best be explained by the saying "in a room full of Deaf people it is the hearing person who cannot sign who is disabled?".
-  Value their identity as Deaf people - Deaf people also generally have little interest in "cures" for deafness and see no value in becoming a different person.
-  **A linguistic and cultural minority** - The Deaf community is considered to be a linguistic and cultural minority group similar to an ethnic community. Just as we capitalise the names of ethnic communities and cultures (eg Italian, Jewish) we capitalise the name of the Deaf community and culture. Since not all people who are physically deaf use Auslan and identify with the Deaf community, the d in deaf is not capitalised when we are referring to all deaf people or the physical condition of not hearing.
-  A Community

Terminology

There are various terms for describing people with varying degrees or kinds of deafness. The most important of these terms are defined below.

-  **Deaf (with a capital D):** used to describe those people who use Auslan to communicate, and identify themselves as members of the signing Deaf community. These people may also identify themselves as "Culturally Deaf." They are more likely to have been born deaf or become deaf early in life, are pre-lingually deaf and use sign language as a primary or preferred communication mode.
-  **deaf (with a small letter d):** a general medical term used to describe people who have a physical condition of hearing loss of varying degrees irrespective of which communication mode they use.
-  **Hard of hearing:** the term used to describe those who have a hearing loss, usually acquired post-lingually and whose communication mode is usually by speech, lip-reading and residual hearing (often amplified by hearing aids). This term also covers those people who have become deafened later in their life.
-  **Hearing impaired:** A hearing impairment (HI) is a full or partial decrease in the ability to hear. The term "hearing impaired" is often used to refer to those who are deaf but it is viewed negatively and even offensive by members of the Deaf community as they perceive the term to be clinical and dismissive of their language and culture.

If you are not sure which term to use, it is advisable to check with the person you are talking with to determine which term they prefer to use. Where a large mixed group of people is being referred to, it is appropriate to use more than one term, e.g., "Television subtitles are enjoyed by Deaf and hard of hearing people throughout Australia".