

## Grammar Guidance – Classifiers (CL)

Learning to describe things non-verbally is essential in Auslan. There is a whole category of ‘productive’ signs that are not lexicalised, that is, they aren’t in the dictionary, and they are often referred to as **classifiers**. They are used extensively, particularly in storytelling, to add dimension and expression.

There are 3 categories of classifiers:

1. **Proform or Entity Classifiers** refer to a set of handshapes regularly used to represent people, animals, vehicles, and parts of the body. The handshape can describe the location, movement and orientation of objects. Two entity handshapes can be used simultaneously to describe the relative locations and movements in space of two (or more) separate things. For example, the pointing index finger may represent a human being and the flat handshape may represent a vehicle. These handshapes may show the movement or location of these objects in space indicating the path and manner in which they are moving. For example: “Sam (pointed finger) is standing in front of the car (flat hand)”. Without context and added information, they are highly subjective and lack easily discernible meaning. Other examples: Person 1 walking, sees Person 2 approaching, Person 1 changes direction. Or using a HS as a CL to demonstrate a car weaving in and out of traffic. Or using a HS as a CL to show eyes wandering around then suddenly something catches eye.
2. **Descriptive or SASS (Size and Shape Specifiers) Classifiers** refer to a set of handshapes regularly used to describe surfaces, shapes and sizes. They often trace around the outline of the shape of the object, grasp the object, or run their hands over the surface of the object. Like Proform Classifiers, they are heavily dependent on additional and/or contextual information in order to clarify that which they are representing. E.g. Large bouncy spikey ball; describing an undulating road; 2 cupped hands showing the size of a tree-trunk; pointing fingers tracing the outline of the shape.
3. **Close/Distant Focus:** Close, or Surrogate Space, is a technique used in signing to illustrate people and objects up close. Alternatively, Distant Focus, or Token Space, refers to people and objects at a distance. E.g. Close – demonstrating how a cat moves stealthily by utilising one’s hands as paws. Distant – demonstrating how a cat moves stealthily by utilising one’s outstretched index finger in the horizontal position moving forward in a slow and side to side manner.