

## Grammar Guidance – Syntax and Topicalisation

## THAT DEAF GUY

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- Syntax generally refers to the sequence in which the subject (S), verb (V), and object (O) usually appear in sentences, i.e. the word order. English generally follows an SVO structure.
- Some languages have a very fixed word order, but Auslan has a fairly flexible word order, especially because it is not heavily dependent on the order of the words to differentiate the subject from the object, but the verb can often be inflected to effectively illustrate this. E.g. Dog – cat – chase or Cat – dog – chase depending on where you set them up in your signing space and the direction of your sign's movement. However if you are unsure of the sentence order in Auslan, as a general rule, you can follow OSV.
- Topicalisation is a key component of Auslan syntax. Topicalisation is when emphasis is placed on the topic/focus of a sentence by either bringing it to the front of the sentence and/or adding stress to that particular word/sign. The topic will first be set up, followed by a comment or additional information in reference to that topic. In Auslan, the verb is usually the last component of the sentence. If you use a time marker (e.g. yesterday), it will go at the beginning of the sentence, before the topic. So, generally in this order: **Time marker, Topic, Comment, Verb.**
- In Auslan, the topic will generally be signed, accompanied by a slight lean of the body either forward or backward, a slight change in facial expression, an eyebrow raise, and will be followed by a brief pause and nod to check for understanding. After such acknowledgement, the signer will then proceed by returning to a more relaxed neutral position whilst commencing the comment.
- Rhetorical questions are statements that are formulated as questions, but are not purposed to elicit a reply - to which no answer is expected. These are extremely common in Auslan. The signer may pose the question and after a brief pause, provide the answer themselves.

Examples:

English	Auslan
I don't like ice-cream.	Ice-cream, I don't-like.
Have you finished your homework?	Homework, you finished you?
I'm going to the shops.	Shop, me go.
I went to the beach yesterday.	Yesterday, beach me go finish.
I'm late cause there was heaps of traffic due to a bad accident.	Me late why? Accident road, traffic bad.