

Concepts, The "to be" verb, Dominance, & Facial Expression

Concepts: not words

Signs do not stand for English words; **signs stand for concepts**. When signing a sentence it is important to think of the meaning or concept you are signing and not the English word. In English, many words sound alike but you get their meaning from the sentence. For example, "I'm *running* late....I love to *run*....My nose is *running*....She has a *run* on her hose..... " In sign language there is a different sign for each of these concepts and you must choose which one to use by its meaning.

Dominance: Hand and Side

Dominance refers to the signer's moving hand and the side of that hand (right or left). Many signs involve one hand moving while the other does not. The **dominant hand should be doing the movement**. For a right-handed person, the dominant hand is *usually* the right hand; for a left-handed person, it is *usually* the left. It is important that you decide which hand is your dominant hand in the beginning so you learn how to form signs properly. It is **not proper to switch** dominance back and forth during signing. Examples of signs which use dominance are "mother, brother, law, you, why." **Not all** signs have dominance. Signs which don't have dominance involve both hands doing the same movement. Examples of signs which don't include dominance are "with, want, here, person, interact."

Dominance is also used when describing the four elements of a sign.

You should instinctively know what your dominant hand/side is.

The "to be" verb: NOT in ASL

Many sentences in English require some form of the "to be" verb. Examples of such sentences include "I **am** fine," "You **are** tired," "Where **is** Joe?," and "They **were** not here." **THERE IS NO TO BE VERB IN ASL!** The above examples are signed, "I FINE," "YOU TIRED," "WHERE JOE?," and "THEY NOT HERE."

Sign Language is a visual language and the "to be" verb is understood, clearly, by correctly signing and spacially identifying your signs.

NOTE: There have been signs created for the "to be" verb but these are **NOT ASL signs**. They have been created to be used in Signed English which is NOT ASL.

Facial Expression: Do it!

In a spoken language, the rise and fall of the voice adds meaning to the words spoken. The various ways one can say "I love you" illustrate the importance of vocal inflection. The characteristic rising of the voice toward the end of a question is another example. In ASL, the face has these duties and supplies additional subtleties of meaning. Signs have meanings in and of themselves, just as words do, but these meanings are altered, shaped, enriched, and amplified by facial expressions. A face that is devoid of expression is to a deaf person the equivalent of a monotone speaker boring and difficult to follow.

Facial expressions in ASL are **especially important when asking questions**.

In general, when one asks a **WH- question** (who, what, why, where, when, which, and how) the **eyebrows go down**.



When asking all other questions, **the eyebrows go up**.

These are not extremely rigid rules, and you may sometimes see some variation, but these rules do generally apply and should be used to become a good signer and to be clearly understood.

When you see the eyebrows move up or down it is a certainty that a question is being asked.

NOTE: An easy and general rule to remember how to move your eyebrows is to think of the expected answer. If an answer is YES or NO, **the eyebrows are up**. If the answer is not a YES or NO but certain information, **the eyebrows are down**. Even in English, we do this naturally so it shouldn't be difficult to do while signing.