

# **Sign Language Phonology**

## **Teaching demonstration**

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# Fingerspelling



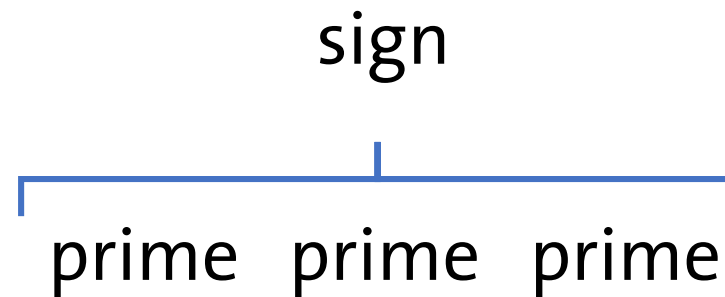
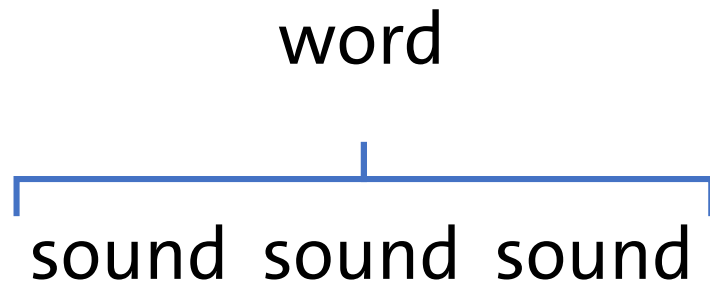
<https://lifeprint.com/asl101/topics/wallpaper1.htm>  
<http://www.lifeprint.com/asl101/pages-signs/n/numbers.htm>

# Syntax

- Function words?
  - THIS CLASS ~~is~~ SAME TOPIC.
- Topic-fronting:
  - SIGN LANGUAGE, I LEARN ONLY ONE YEAR.
- Wh-words tend to come last:
  - YOU NOTICE WHAT?

# What is phonology?

Phonology: The study of sound patterns in language



Phonology: The study of the smallest contrastive units in language

# Minimal pairs

1. SORRY, PLEASE
2. SCHOOL, IMPOSSIBLE
3. YELLOW, BLUE
4. CANNOT, LAST
5. THINK, KNOW
6. CANDY, APPLE, NERVE
7. SCIENCE, BIOLOGY, CHEMISTRY

[handspeak.com](https://handspeak.com)

# AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE **handshapes**

NOTE: You will see these handshapes from different angles when used as part of signs.



# 5 parameters of sign language

1. Handshape

2. \_\_\_\_\_?

3. \_\_\_\_\_?

4. \_\_\_\_\_?

5. \_\_\_\_\_?

# Parameter 2

1. ENOUGH, PRESSURE
2. CHOCOLATE, CHURCH
3. AMERICA, MACHINE
4. RAIN, SNOW
5. CHAIR, SIT
6. I-GIVE-YOU, YOU-GIVE-ME



# Parameter 3

1. ONION, APPLE
2. FORGET, BETTER
3. FATHER, MOTHER, FINE
4. KNOW, DOCTOR
5. BIRD, PRINTER
6. CURIOUS, VOLUNTEER

# Parameter 4

1. MAYBE, BALANCE
2. CHAIR, NAME
3. KING, PRINCE
4. I, YOU, HE/SHE/IT
5. MY, YOUR, HIS/HERS/ITS
6. LOOK-AT-ME, LOOK-AT-YOU

# Parameter 5

1. LATE, NOT-YET
2. WAY-OVER-THERE, LONG-AGO, MANY
3. RECENTLY, NEARBY
4. MEDIUM, GOING-STEADY

Note: Handspeak entries may not have the same NMM marking as demonstrated.

# Parameter 5 (continued)

- 5. Wh-questions:            WHERE?  
                                  HOW-MANY?  
                                  THIS SIGN WHAT?
- 6. Yes/no questions:        YOU DOCTOR?
- 7. Negation:                    I (NOT) DOCTOR

# 5 parameters of sign language

1. Handshape
2. Movement
3. Location
4. Orientation
5. Non-manual marking (NMM)

# How many parameters are different?

1. UNDERSTAND, 11
2. DIRTY, PIG
3. CAR, WHICH
4. YELLOW, WRONG
5. COMPUTER, BICYCLE
6. SCHOOL, COOK

# How do we transcribe sign language?

TODAY FOCUS P-H-O-N-O-L-O-G-Y

wh  
FOCUS WHAT

y/n  
FOCUS LINGUISTICS

neg  
FOCUS ENGLISH

# A whole new world!

- What **sounds/primes** can be contrastive?  
What **combinations** are possible?  
What are the **natural classes**?
- What kinds of **social variation** do we find?
- Which phenomena are **language-specific**?  
Are there **universals** across spoken and sign language?



# Why did people think sign language had no phonology?



**Prejudice – Iconicity – Sequentiality**

# What have we learnt?

- Phonology is not as simple as we thought
  - Sequential vs. simultaneous
- Sign language is not simple either
  - 5 parameters!

# Want to learn sign language?

- American Sign Language
  - Handspeak.com
  - Lifeprint.com
  - Signing Savvy
- Singapore Sign Language
  - Singapore Association for the Deaf ([video](#))
  - ExtraOrdinary Horizons

# Questions?