

Why Study American Sign Language ASL

<http://www.lifeprint.com/asl101/pages-layout/whystudyasl.htm>

Why do so many people want to learn sign?

The answer might be found in the results of a study conducted by a researcher at the University of California Los Angeles. Albert Mehrabian, a well known psychologist, discovered that only seven percent of the meaning conveyed by typical utterance regarding our feelings and attitudes comes from the words we use, 38 percent from our voice, and 55 percent from our body language. When our body language conflicts with our words, listeners will typically pay more attention to our nonverbal message (Mehrabian, 1972).

Think what a difference it would make if you could improve your nonverbal communication skills by just a small percent? How many more sales would you make? How many more satisfied customers would you have? How many more interpersonal conflicts would you avoid by just being a little bit better at communicating nonverbally?

Next time you give a speech wouldn't it be great to use a bunch of natural looking gestures that hammer home your important points to the subconscious minds of your listeners? Next time you're negotiating a contract, wouldn't you just love to get a handle on what's going through the other person's mind? Being more attuned to his or her body language might just help you avoid making some costly communication mistakes.

American Sign Language (ASL) is growing in usage everyday.

Many states have passed laws recognizing ASL as a complete and natural language. Hundreds of colleges and universities throughout America now accept ASL in fulfillment of language entrance and exit requirements.

More and more television stations are using sign language in their programs and advertising.

Most school systems are now mainstreaming their deaf and hard of hearing students--dramatically increasing the need for sign language interpreters.

More and more employers are looking for applicants who can sign. They know that having signers on their staff can contribute toward a good faith showing of compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act and similar legislation.

A snowball effect is taking place as more and more people learn to use American Sign Language.

While many languages are "dying off," **American Sign Language** is growing in usage everyday.

Why Study ASL?

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American Sign Language (ASL) is the language of the Deaf community in the United States and much of Canada. It is the central vehicle for communication among Deaf people, and is therefore also a binding force in their culture. ASL uses a gestural-visual modality in which manual signs, facial expressions, and body movements and postures all convey complex linguistic information. It is a fully developed language, with its own systems for articulation, forming words and sentences, and meaning. ASL is not a derivative of English, and its study raises many important scientific questions about the true universals of language, as well as their developmental and neurological origins. Not only is it a full natural language, it is also at the core of a new literary tradition, both in poetry and theater.

ASL is estimated to be the fourth most commonly used language in the U.S. Through learning the preferred language of the Deaf community, students who study ASL gain access to the rich cultural heritage of that community, which includes a distinguished tradition of visual poetry, narrative, and theater. Students of ASL also learn about other aspects of American Deaf culture, including the values and outlooks of Deaf people, and social and educational aspects of deafness.

Students of ASL may find that they gain a new perspective on how human languages are structured. Through learning a language that uses a different modality of expression than the oral-auditory modality of spoken languages, students begin to discover properties that are common to all languages. Linguists' research on the commonalities between signed and spoken language provides strong evidence that all languages are governed by the same basic properties.

Finally, study of ASL also provides practical training for students entering a range of professions in the field of deafness, and may strengthen students' qualifications for various non-deafness careers. As social, community, legal and educational services have expanded nationwide, many career possibilities have opened up for persons interested in professional work in deaf-related fields. Study of ASL also provides excellent preparation to students for professional careers as sign language interpreters, sign language instructors, counselors, government specialists, audiologists, speech pathologists, program administrators, community service personnel, and many other deaf-related vocations.

Because the city of Rochester has a large Deaf population, students at University of Rochester have a unique opportunity to learn and use ASL outside the classroom. Students in the more advanced ASL courses regularly attend theatrical events and lectures in ASL at local schools and colleges.

