



Time Indicators and Tense Markers

How tense works in ASL

ASL does not change the verb to show tense. Instead you set the time up front, and everything after it is understood to happen then.

Put the time indicator at the **beginning of the sentence** and raise your eyebrows on it. This works the same way for past, present, and future.

No time indicator?

If there is no time indicator in the sentence, the person watching will assume you mean the **present tense**. Set the time once and it carries until you change it.

What do you do?

1

Put the time indicator first
at the beginning of the sentence

2

Raise your eyebrows
on the time indicator

3

Sign the rest
the tense is already set

The eyebrow raise on the time indicator is what marks it as the topic of the sentence. **Set the time first, then say what happened.**

Practice sentences

I graduated high school in 2014.

2014 I GRADUATE+FINISH WHAT? (rh-q) HIGH SCHOOL.

I will finish it tomorrow.

TOMORROW I WILL FINISH.

or

TOMORROW I FINISH WILL.

I ate an apple.

I EAT FINISH APPLE.

or

APPLE I EAT FINISH.

rh-q = rhetorical question

Your turn

Write one sentence in the past, one in the future, and one with no time indicator at all. Sign them to a partner and ask them when they think each one happened.

ENGLISH

ASL

ENGLISH

ASL

ENGLISH

ASL