

Rhetorical Questions

What is a rhetorical question?

A question you ask so that **you can answer it yourself**. You are not waiting for a reply — you are using the question to introduce your own information.

It uses a wh-word, but it is not a real question.

Use it sparingly

Rhetorical questions are a normal part of ASL, but they lose their effect fast. **Do not use too many in one conversation.**

Wh-words used in rhetorical questions:

WHO	WHAT	WHERE	WHY
HOW	HOW MANY	WHAT FOR	HOW MUCH

How to sign one

1

Raise your eyebrows

up, not down

2

Lean your head forward

toward the person

3

Hold the last sign

usually the wh-word

Watch the eyebrows — this is where students get caught

Yes / no question

Eyebrows UP

WH question

Eyebrows DOWN

Rhetorical question

Eyebrows UP

A rhetorical question uses a wh-word but takes the **raised** eyebrows of a yes/no question. Lower them and you have asked a real question instead.

WHY as “because”

Many signers use WHY in rhetorical-question mode where English would say **because**. It is the same structure: ask, then answer yourself.

Practice sentences

I have two cats.

CAT I HAVE HOW-MANY? 2.

I work at a school.

I WORK WHERE? SCHOOL.

Your turn

Write two rhetorical questions of your own, then sign them to a partner. If they answer you, your eyebrows probably went the wrong way.

ENGLISH

ASL

ENGLISH

ASL