

ASL grammar is not English grammar. It leans on **visual and spatial structure**, facial expression, and non-manual signals to carry meaning. Here is how the main pieces work.

1 Sentence structure

Topic first, then a comment about it — not English's subject-verb-object.

I am eating a sandwich.

SANDWICH ME EAT

The dog is running.

DOG RUN

2 Non-manual markers and questions

Facial expression, head movement, and posture carry the grammar.

- Yes/no: raise the eyebrows, tilt the head forward, hold the last sign.
- WH: furrow the eyebrows, lean forward, hold the wh-word at the end.

Are you a student?

YOU STUDENT?

Do you want coffee?

YOU WANT COFFEE?

What is your name?

YOUR NAME WHAT?

What is your favorite color?

YOUR FAVORITE COLOR WHAT?

3 Time indicators

Time is set at the beginning. Once established, it does not need repeating.

I will go to the store tomorrow.

TOMORROW STORE ME GO

Yesterday I saw my friend.

YESTERDAY FRIEND ME SEE

4 Directional verbs

The movement of the verb shows who is doing what to whom.

- GIVE — "I give you" moves from you toward the other person; "you give me" moves back toward you.
- HELP — the same path, from the signer to the person or from the person to the signer.

5 Classifiers

Handshapes that stand in for objects, people, and actions.

- CL:1 — a single person walking.
- CL:3 — a vehicle moving down the road.
- CL:B — a flat surface, or a book.

6 Role shifting

The signer shifts body or head to become each character.

- In a conversation between a teacher and a student, look slightly left for the teacher's lines and slightly right for the student's.

7 Repetition for emphasis

Repeating a sign, or making the movement bigger, adds intensity.

Very big

BIG BIG – with a larger movement

Really angry

ANGRY – repeated, with exaggerated expression

8 Use of space

The space around you shows relationships, locations, and paths.

- Describing two people: set one on each side and point back to them.

Travel

ME GO STORE – the hand arcs to show the journey

9 Pronouns and pointing

Pointing replaces he, she, and it. Establish a referent once, then point back to it.

My mom is nice. She is a teacher.

MY MOM NICE. IX-SHE TEACHER

10 Negation

A head shake, the sign NOT, or a negative facial expression.

I don't like pizza.

ME NO LIKE PIZZA or PIZZA ME LIKE-NOT

I didn't go to the store.

STORE ME NOT GO

11 Adjectives and adverbs

Shown through the size of the movement, its intensity, and the face.

The tree is very tall.

TREE TALL – with a large movement

He runs fast.

HE RUN FAST – signed quickly, with puffed cheeks

Practice sentences

Tomorrow, I will visit my grandmother.

TOMORROW GRANDMA ME VISIT.

Where is the bathroom?

BATHROOM WHERE? (eyebrows furrowed)

I like ice cream, but I don't like cake.

ICE CREAM ME LIKE, CAKE ME NO LIKE.

Tips for students

1 Focus on facial expression

Always match your face to the meaning of your signs.

2 Think visually

Use space, classifiers, and directionality to build a clear visual message.

3 Practice role shift

Tell stories and dialogues to get comfortable shifting between characters.