

Classifier Handshapes

What each one represents, with examples

What classifiers do

Classifiers are handshapes and movements that stand in for objects, people, and the way they relate to each other in space. They are how ASL describes anything visual or spatial.

Handshapes 1–6

CL : 1

01

A person, a thin object, or a pole-like item

HANDSHAPE One finger extended, the others closed.

- › A person walking — move **CL : 1** forward.
- › A pencil standing upright.
- › A stick falling to the ground.

CL : 2

02

Two people, eyes, or legs

HANDSHAPE Two fingers extended, the others closed.

- › Two people walking together, side by side.
- › Legs swinging while sitting on a chair.
- › Eyes scanning across a room.

CL : 3

03

Vehicles and wheeled objects

HANDSHAPE Three fingers extended, like the number 3.

- › A car driving down a road.
- › A bike swerving around obstacles.
- › A bus stopping and unloading passengers.

CL : 4

04

Groups of objects, flowing items, or people in a line

HANDSHAPE Four fingers extended, thumb tucked in.

- › A line of people waiting.
- › Water dripping or flowing from a faucet.
- › Animal fur bristling.

CL : 5

05

Large groups, spread-out objects, or chaotic motion

HANDSHAPE Open hand, all fingers extended.

- › A crowd of people dispersing.
- › Leaves falling from a tree.
- › Waves crashing on a shore.

CL : B

06

Flat or wide objects — books, walls, floors

HANDSHAPE Palm open and flat.

- › A flat surface like a table.
- › A piece of paper lying on a desk.
- › A door opening or closing.

Remember

HANDSHAPE = the object

MOVEMENT = the action

LOCATION = the space

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Handshapes 7–14

CL : C

07

Cylindrical objects and containers

HANDSHAPE Hand curved into a C shape.

- › A cup being placed on a table.
- › Holding a bottle or a can.
- › A tree trunk or a pipe.

CL : O

08

Small or round objects

HANDSHAPE Hand closed into an O shape.

- › Holding a small ball.
- › A pebble being tossed.
- › An apple in hand.

CL : F

09

Small, flat, or circular objects

HANDSHAPE Index finger and thumb touching to form a circle.

- › A coin being placed on a table.
- › A button falling off.
- › A ring being slipped onto a finger.

CL : G

10

Thin or narrow objects

HANDSHAPE Index finger and thumb extended slightly apart.

- › Showing the thickness of a book.
- › A slice of bread or a sheet of paper.
- › A thin rod or stick.

CL : V

11

A person or animal in a sitting position

HANDSHAPE V shape, two fingers extended.

- › A person sitting on a chair.
- › A rabbit hopping.
- › A person crossing their legs while seated.

CL : 5w

12 · BENT 5

Clawed or spread-out objects

HANDSHAPE Open hand, fingers spread and slightly bent.

- › Claw marks on a surface.
- › A large group of people gathering.
- › A tree's branches swaying in the wind.

CL : S

13

Solid objects, or anything fist-shaped

HANDSHAPE Closed fist.

- › A rock being thrown.
- › A person pounding on a table.
- › A car stopping abruptly.

CL : ILY

14

Planes, helicopters, and related shapes

HANDSHAPE ILY handshape — pinky, index, and thumb extended.

- › A helicopter flying overhead.
- › A plane taking off or landing.

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Handshapes 15–17

CL:10

15

Items held in a fist

HANDSHAPE Thumbs-up shape.

- › Holding a hammer and pounding a nail.
- › Carrying a bag or a suitcase.
- › Gripping a steering wheel.

CL:X

16

Curved or hooked objects

HANDSHAPE X shape, index finger curved.

- › A hook grabbing onto something.
- › A person limping, for the leg or foot.
- › A clawed animal scratching.

CL:4^bent

17

Drips and streams of liquid

HANDSHAPE Four fingers bent downward.

- › Water dripping from a pipe.
- › Blood streaming from a wound.
- › Rain falling on a surface.

Tips for students

1 • Practice spatial awareness

Treat the signing space as a 3D area where objects and people interact, not a flat surface in front of you.

2 • Combine classifiers

Two hands can carry two classifiers at once — **CL:1** for a person and **CL:3** for a car to show someone crossing the street.

3 • Experiment with movement

Fast, slow, curving, stopping — how a classifier moves changes what it means.

4 • Use facial expressions

They are not decoration. Facial expression carries the context and the emotion of what the classifier is doing.