

Rhetorical questions in ASL

Name _____

Date _____

THE SHORT VERSION

A rhetorical question in ASL does not wait for an answer — the signer gives it, immediately. It is a way of handing your audience the point just before you make it. This sheet covers what it is, then eight classroom activities and eleven longer projects that put it to work.

WHAT IT IS

The definition, and what makes the ASL version different.

DEFINITION

In ASL, a rhetorical question does not ask for an answer. It emphasizes a point, introduces new information, or organizes what the signer is about to say. The signer raises the brows, pauses briefly, and then answers the question themselves.

HOW IT IS MARKED

English can leave a rhetorical question to tone of voice. ASL marks it on the face: brows up, a small hold, then the answer. Without the marker it reads as an ordinary question, and the audience will sit there waiting.

WH- SIGNS, DIFFERENT JOB

Rhetorical questions usually use WH-signs — WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHEN, WHY, HOW. The difference is on the face. A real WH-question furrows the brows; a rhetorical one raises them, and the answer follows without a pause for anyone else to fill.

EXAMPLES

Each one answers itself, immediately.

FOUR TO SIGN

- ◆ Why am I learning ASL? I love the language!
WHY IX-me LEARN ASL? LOVE LANGUAGE!
- ◆ Where do I go to school? Gallaudet University!
WHERE IX-me SCHOOL? GALLAUDET UNIVERSITY!
- ◆ How do I practice ASL? I sign every day!
HOW IX-me PRACTICE ASL? SIGN EVERY DAY!
- ◆ Who is my favorite teacher? My ASL teacher!
WHO IX-me FAVORITE TEACHER? ASL TEACHER!

REINFORCEMENT ACTIVITIES

Eight ways to practice inside a class period.

1 RHETORICAL QUESTION MATCH-UP

ALL LEVELS

- ◆ Make sentence strips with the ASL gloss of a rhetorical question on one side and its answer on the other.
- ◆ Students match each question to its answer.
- ◆ Then they sign the pair with the facial grammar it needs.

2 RQ STORYTELLING CHALLENGE

HIGH SCHOOL & COLLEGE

- ◆ Students write a short story, fictional or personal, that uses at least three rhetorical questions.
- ◆ They perform it for the class with the right expressions and pauses.

3 FIND THE RHETORICAL QUESTION

MIDDLE & HIGH SCHOOL

- ◆ Show ASL video — signed vlogs or stories — and have students write down every rhetorical question they spot.
- ◆ Discuss what each one adds to the telling.

4 SILENT DEBATE

HIGH SCHOOL & COLLEGE

- ◆ Assign a topic and require arguments built on rhetorical questions.
Topics: Should ASL be required in all schools? Is social media helpful or harmful?

5 ASL CHARADES

MIDDLE & HIGH SCHOOL

- ◆ Write English sentences with a rhetorical question and its answer on cards.
- ◆ One student draws a card and signs it while the class guesses the question.
Card: Why do I drink coffee? It keeps me awake!
Signed: WHY IX-me DRINK COFFEE? KEEP ME AWAKE!

6 ASL COMIC STRIP CHALLENGE

MIDDLE & HIGH SCHOOL

- ◆ Students build a four-panel comic in which a character uses rhetorical questions.
- ◆ On paper, digitally, or in an app such as Pixton. They sign the dialogue in class afterward.

7 PASS THE RQ

ALL LEVELS

- ◆ In a circle, the first student signs a rhetorical question.
- ◆ The next answers it, then signs one of their own. Keep going until everyone has had a turn.
WHY IX-me LOVE ASL? BEAUTIFUL LANGUAGE!
WHY BEAUTIFUL? EXPRESSIVE AND VISUAL!
HOW IX-me PRACTICE? SIGN WITH FRIENDS!

8 SONG INTERPRETATION

HIGH SCHOOL & COLLEGE

- ◆ Students translate part of a song into ASL and add rhetorical questions to carry the grammar and the storytelling.
English: I see trees of green, red roses too.
ASL: WHAT IX-me SEE? TREE GREEN, ROSE RED.

PROJECT IDEAS

Eleven longer assignments, from one class period to a full unit.

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|---|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1 | RHETORICAL QUESTION SKIT | ALL LEVELS |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Pairs or groups build a short skit using at least five rhetorical questions. ◆ They record the performance or present it live. | | |
| 2 | ASL POETRY OR SLAM POETRY | HIGH SCHOOL & COLLEGE |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Students compose and perform ASL poetry that uses rhetorical questions to carry meaning. ◆ Strengthens expressive skill and linguistic creativity. | | |
| 3 | ASL INTERVIEW PROJECT | HIGH SCHOOL & COLLEGE |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Students interview a Deaf person or an ASL teacher about the role rhetorical questions play in storytelling and conversation. ◆ They compile what they learn into a short video presentation. | | |
| 4 | TEACH THE TEACHER | MIDDLE & HIGH SCHOOL |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Students make an instructional video or presentation on rhetorical questions. ◆ They then teach a beginner – a teacher, a parent, another student – to use them properly. | | |
| 5 | ASL MEME OR SHORT VIDEO | ALL LEVELS |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Students make a funny or informative ASL clip built on rhetorical questions.
Why do I study for tests? So I don't fail! – signed big, with an exaggerated expression. | | |
| 6 | RHETORICAL QUESTION SHORT FILM | HIGH SCHOOL & COLLEGE |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ A filmed story of two to five minutes with at least five rhetorical questions. ◆ Students add captions for beginner viewers, then reflect on what the rhetorical questions did for the storytelling. | | |

7 DEAF CULTURE NEWS REPORT

HIGH SCHOOL & COLLEGE

- Groups produce a mock news report that uses rhetorical questions to hit the key points, presented like a Deaf news anchor.
WHO HELPED DEAF COMMUNITY GAIN RIGHTS? DEAF ACTIVISTS!
WHY IMPORTANT? EQUAL ACCESS!

8 ASL VLOGGING CHALLENGE

ALL LEVELS

- Each student records a vlog explaining something they love, using at least three rhetorical questions.
WHAT IX-me FAVORITE SPORT? BASKETBALL!
WHY LOVE? FAST, EXCITING!

9 DEBATE TOURNAMENT

HIGH SCHOOL & COLLEGE

- Teams take assigned topics and must build rhetorical questions into their arguments.
Topic: Should all schools teach ASL?
WHY IMPORTANT? BRIDGE COMMUNICATION BETWEEN HEARING AND DEAF!

10 ASL INFOGRAPHIC

ALL LEVELS

- Students design an infographic covering the definition, examples, the facial expressions involved, and why rhetorical questions matter in ASL.
- Built in Canva, Google Slides, or by hand.

11 SOCIAL MEDIA CHALLENGE

ALL LEVELS

- A fifteen to thirty second ASL video explaining rhetorical questions, then a challenge to three friends to post their own.
WHY LEARN ASL? CONNECT WITH DEAF COMMUNITY!

BEFORE YOU ASSIGN THESE

The level tags are suggestions, not limits — most of these scale up or down with the length you require. Two of the projects ask students to post video publicly, so check your district's media-release policy first and keep a class-only version available for students who would rather not appear online.