

ASL, PSE, and SEE

Name _____

Date _____

THREE DIFFERENT THINGS

Three different things get signed in American classrooms, and they are not the same kind of thing. One is a language. One is what happens when two languages meet. One is a code built to put English on the hands. Knowing which is which tells you what to expect from the grammar — and from the person using it.

AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE (ASL)

A natural, visual language with its own grammar and structure, separate from English.

ORIGIN

- ◆ Developed in the early 1800s from French Sign Language (LSF), Martha's Vineyard Sign Language, and home signs.
- ◆ Used by Deaf people in the United States and parts of Canada for more than two hundred years.

GRAMMAR

- ◆ Its own word order, often topic-comment or object-subject-verb.
- ◆ Non-manual markers — eyebrow movement, facial expression — carry grammar, not just feeling.
- ◆ Its own rules for questions, negation, tense, and classifiers.

EXAMPLE

English: I am going to the store.

ASL: STORE I GO — with the facial expression and directionality it needs.

KEY TRAITS

- ◆ A primary language for Deaf adults and Deaf children.
- ◆ Culturally Deaf people identify with ASL.
- ◆ Rich in visual storytelling and facial grammar.

PIDGIN SIGNED ENGLISH (PSE)

A mix of ASL and English, also called contact signing.

WHERE YOU SEE IT

- ◆ In interpreting.
- ◆ In mixed hearing and Deaf settings.
- ◆ Among people learning ASL, and among people who grew up oral and sign occasionally.

GRAMMAR

- ◆ Follows English word order, but usually drops small words such as is, am, the, and a.
- ◆ Uses ASL signs without using ASL grammar fully.
- ◆ Facial expression and classifiers appear, but not consistently.

EXAMPLE

English: She is going to school.

PSE: SHE GO SCHOOL — English order, ASL signs.

KEY TRAITS

- ◆ A bridge between English and ASL.
- ◆ No strict rules; it varies with the person using it.
- ◆ Useful for communication, but not a full language.

A NOTE ON THE NAME

Many linguists avoid the word pidgin here, because what happens between ASL and English does not behave the way a true pidgin does. Contact signing, or contact sign, is the more accurate term, and it is what newer materials tend to use.

SIGNING EXACT ENGLISH (SEE)

Not a language: a manual code that represents English exactly.

PURPOSE

- ◆ Created to help Deaf children learn English grammar, reading, and writing.
- ◆ Common in educational settings, especially in past decades.

FEATURES

- ◆ Every English word, prefix, and suffix is signed, including -ing, -ed, a, and the.
- ◆ English word order is followed strictly.
- ◆ Includes invented signs for English words with no ASL equivalent, such as are, the, and it.

EXAMPLE

English: I am going to the store.

SEE: I + AM + GO + -ING + TO + THE + STORE — each word signed separately.

KEY TRAITS

- ◆ Not used in casual conversation in the Deaf community.
- ◆ Considered helpful by some teachers, and criticized by others as confusing or unnatural for native signers.
- ◆ Often used in speech therapy and oral education programs.

SIDE BY SIDE

The same five questions asked of all three.

FEATURE	ASL	PSE	SEE
Type	Natural language	Contact language	Manually coded English
Word order	Topic-comment or OSV	English-like	Exactly English
Grammar	Unique to ASL	Mixed	Mirrors English
English words	No	Some	All
Invented signs	No	No	Yes

IN SUMMARY

ASL is a full, complex visual language used by the Deaf community. PSE is a mix that uses ASL signs in English word order. SEE is a system that signs every English word, built to teach English rather than to be a language of its own.