

# Tips for New ASL Teachers

Teaching ASL is exciting, rewarding, and unique. This handout provides practical tips to help new ASL teachers create an engaging, effective, and culturally respectful classroom.

## 1. Establish a Voice-Off Policy Early

From Day 1, encourage students to communicate without speaking. Use gestures, facial expressions, and signs—even if vocabulary is limited. This builds immersion and prevents students from defaulting to English.

## 2. Model, Model, Model

Always demonstrate signs slowly, clearly, and in context. Face students so they can see both handshape and facial grammar. Repeat signs in natural conversation, not just in isolation.

## 3. Teach in Context, Not Lists

Instead of just drilling vocabulary, use it in short dialogues or skits. Example: Don't just teach EAT. Teach 'I EAT PIZZA,' 'YOU WANT APPLE?' Context helps students remember and use signs more quickly.

## 4. Engage Students with Activities

Use games (ASL Bingo, Charades, 'Around the World') for review. Role-plays and storytelling keep the language alive. Encourage movement—ASL is not meant to be learned sitting still.

## 5. Incorporate Deaf Culture Early

Share stories, videos, and guest speakers from the Deaf community. Teach cultural norms (eye contact, attention-getting strategies, name signs). Students learn that ASL is more than just vocabulary—it's identity, history, and community.

## 6. Scaffold Learning

Start small (5–7 words at a time) and build gradually. Review often. Spiral back to old content while adding new. Use visual aids, props, and tech tools (like ASLdeafined) to reinforce learning.

## 7. Balance Receptive & Expressive Practice

Receptive: Students watch and identify signs. Expressive: Students produce signs in sentences. Always include both so students don't just recognize signs but can use them.

## **8. Be Patient—with Students and Yourself**

Many beginners struggle with facial expressions, non-manual markers, or directional verbs. Celebrate progress, even if it's small. Remember: learning ASL is about communication, not perfection.

## **9. Use Technology Wisely**

Platforms like ASLdeafined.com provide structured lessons, retention exercises, and video support. Great for homework, practice, and review. Pair it with in-class interaction for best results.

## **10. Stay Connected to the Deaf Community**

Attend Deaf events, workshops, or Silent Dinners. Invite Deaf guest speakers to class. The best teachers model lifelong learning by engaging in the community themselves.

■ **Final Thought:** You don't have to be a 'perfect signer' to be an effective ASL teacher. Focus on creating a fun, immersive, and respectful environment where students feel motivated to learn.