

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Before the First Bell Rings

Preparing your ASL classroom for a successful school year

Every new school year brings a fresh opportunity to inspire, encourage, and connect with your students. Before the first bell rings and before your students walk through the classroom door, you have the opportunity to create an environment where students feel welcome, respected, and excited to learn American Sign Language.

Your classroom doesn't need to be perfect. It simply needs to be organized, visually accessible, and inviting. A little preparation before school begins can help your lessons run more smoothly and allow you to focus on what matters most — teaching and building relationships with your students.

Why It Matters

Students begin forming first impressions within moments of entering your classroom. A welcoming environment helps reduce anxiety, encourages participation, and establishes a positive tone for the entire school year.

And since ASL is a visual language, your classroom should also support visual learning. Clear sightlines, good lighting, and organized materials help students focus on communication instead of distractions.

Classroom Preparation Checklist

01 Classroom Layout

- ☐ Arrange seating so every student can clearly see you and one another.
- ☐ Walk around the room and check visibility from every seat.
- ☐ Remove unnecessary visual distractions near your teaching area.
- ☐ Leave enough space for students to work with partners and small groups.

02 Lighting

- ☐ Make sure your face and hands are well lit.
- ☐ Reduce glare from windows whenever possible.
- ☐ Avoid standing directly in front of bright windows while signing.

03 Technology

- ☐ Test your projector or interactive board.
- ☐ Check your internet connection.
- ☐ Verify classroom speakers are working.
- ☐ Log into ASLdeafined before the first day.
- ☐ Test lesson videos.
- ☐ Confirm any classroom or document cameras are working, if you plan to use them.

04 Classroom Materials

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| ☐ Student name tents | ☐ Sticky notes |
| ☐ Student notebooks | ☐ Emergency substitute folder |
| ☐ Dry erase markers | ☐ Whiteboard eraser |
| ☐ Lesson materials organized | ☐ Printed classroom procedures |

05 Visual Supports

Consider displaying:

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| • Manual Alphabet | • Deaf Awareness posters |
| • Classroom Expectations | • Common Classroom Signs |
| • Numbers | • Positive encouragement |

Remember — less is often more. A clean, organized classroom is usually easier for students to process than walls filled with decorations.

06 Prepare Your ASLdeafined Classroom

Before students arrive, take a few minutes to make sure everything is ready.

- ☐ Create your classes.
- ☐ Add students, or sync your roster through your Learning Management System.
- ☐ Confirm student logins.
- ☐ Review your first week's lessons.
- ☐ Explore the Teacher Resources connected to those lessons.
- ☐ Verify videos and activities load correctly.
- ☐ Open your first lesson before class begins.

A few minutes of preparation now can prevent unnecessary interruptions during class.

Think About Your Classroom Culture

Before the school year begins, ask yourself:

“What kind of classroom do I want my students to remember?”

Students may not remember every vocabulary word they learn, but they will remember how they felt in your classroom. Create a classroom where students feel:

- Safe asking questions
- Respected by classmates
- Comfortable making mistakes
- Excited to communicate
- Encouraged to participate

Your classroom culture begins with you.

Paul's Best Practice

Before students arrive, I always sit in several different seats throughout the classroom. From each seat I ask myself one question:

“Can I clearly see the teacher's face, hands, and body movement?”

If the answer is no, I rearrange the room before the first day. Small adjustments to seating often make a tremendous difference in student success, because every student deserves a clear view of the language.

Three Quick Wins

- ✓ Walk around your classroom from your students' perspective.
- ✓ Test every piece of technology before school begins.
- ✓ Prepare one fun activity that gets students signing within the first five minutes of class.

Reflection

Before your first class, ask yourself:

What is one thing I can do to help every student feel successful on the very first day?

Sometimes that one small change makes all the difference.

Continue Exploring

After completing your classroom preparations, continue with these Teacher Resources:

- ▶ [The First Day of Class](#)
- ▶ [The First Five Days](#)
- ▶ [25 Ice Breakers for ASL Classes](#)
- ▶ [Reviewing Without Boring Students](#)
- ▶ [Building Deaf Culture from Day One](#)

Teaching ASL is about more than vocabulary. It's about helping students build confidence, communicate with others, and develop an appreciation for the language and culture of the Deaf community.

Have an amazing school year!

Paul A. Fugate

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