

March Bell Ringers

ASL Grammar in Action

20 BELL RINGERS · BEGINNER THROUGH LEVEL 5

Start class. Start signing.



MONTHLY FOCUS

ASL Grammar • NMS • Sentence Structure • Time • Space • Role Shift • Depiction • Meaning • Natural ASL

TEACHER NOTE

Grammar is not about memorizing rules for five minutes every morning. March asks students to use, notice, compare, fix, and experiment with ASL structures. The goal is to help students understand how linguistic choices create visual meaning.

HOW DIFFERENTIATION WORKS

Most activities include Beginner, Intermediate, Advanced, Advanced Plus, and Level 5 options. Some are intentionally marked **All Levels**. Teachers may move students up or down as appropriate.

OUR PHILOSOPHY

ASLdeafined provides a strong starting point while leaving space for teacher judgment, student contribution, and classroom creativity.

WHAT'S INSIDE

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1

Time Comes First

LEVELED

Teacher gives a simple idea, such as:

EXAMPLE

"I went to the store yesterday."

BEGINNER	Identify the time concept.
INTERMEDIATE	Put the time information in an appropriate location.
ADVANCED	Create several sentences with different time frames.
ADVANCED PLUS	Shift time frames while keeping the message clear.
LEVEL 5	Tell a short narrative using natural time referencing.

MAKE IT YOURS

Teacher supplies sentences from the current unit.

2

Your Eyebrows Have a Job!

ALL LEVELS

Communicate a yes/no question. Now communicate a WH-question. Partners identify what changed without discussing the vocabulary. Then exaggerate the NMS. Then make it natural.

TEACHER NOTE

Big Idea: Your face is part of the language.

3

English or ASL?

LEVELED

Teacher presents an English sentence. Students ask:

STUDENTS ASK

"Would I structure this exactly the same way in ASL?"

BEGINNER	Identify the important concepts.
INTERMEDIATE	Reorganize a simple message.
ADVANCED	Compare English and ASL versions.
ADVANCED PLUS	Explain why restructuring improves the message.
LEVEL 5	Discuss multiple possible ASL constructions based on context.

TEACHER NOTE

This is not about finding one magical "correct ASL word order."

4

Where Did You Put It?

LEVELED

Establish three objects or people in signing space.

BEGINNER	Point back to each location.
INTERMEDIATE	Describe relationships between them.
ADVANCED	Maintain referents through several sentences.
ADVANCED PLUS	Add movement and interactions.
LEVEL 5	Maintain complex spatial relationships naturally throughout discourse.

5

Fix My Face

ALL LEVELS

Teacher signs a message with intentionally mismatched NMS — a question with a neutral face, strong emotion with no expression, or a negative message with inappropriate expression. Students identify what is wrong, then reproduce it more naturally.

TEACHER NOTE

Have fun with the intentionally awkward version.

6

Topic → Comment

LEVELED

Teacher provides a simple topic, such as MY CAR. Students add information about it.

BEGINNER	One comment.
INTERMEDIATE	Add description.
ADVANCED	Expand into several connected thoughts.
ADVANCED PLUS	Establish context before providing new information.
LEVEL 5	Explore how topicalization and context setting change discourse organization.

MAKE IT YOURS

Use vocabulary from your current unit.

7

Make It a Question

LEVELED

Teacher gives a statement. Students transform it into a yes/no question, and then a WH-question.

BEGINNER	Basic transformation.
INTERMEDIATE	Add appropriate NMS.
ADVANCED	Create multiple question types.
ADVANCED PLUS	Embed questions naturally in conversation.
LEVEL 5	Discuss how intent and context affect question construction.

8

Show the Action

ALL LEVELS

Do not simply produce the vocabulary sign — show how it happens. Slowly? Quickly? Awkwardly? Carefully? Suddenly? Partners identify the details.

TEACHER GIVES AN ACTION

Walking

Driving

Opening

Falling

Carrying

TEACHER NOTE

Big Idea: Grammar and meaning can live in movement.

9

Before, During, After

LEVELED

CHOOSE AN EVENT

Class

Lunch

Game

Trip

Movie

BEGINNER	Communicate what happens first and next.
INTERMEDIATE	Sequence 3 events.
ADVANCED	Establish time and sequence clearly.
ADVANCED PLUS	Add transitions and detail.
LEVEL 5	Create a cohesive narrative with natural temporal organization.

10

Teacher’s Choice

TEACHER CHOICE

March grammar checkpoint: what ASL structure are your students struggling with? Give them five minutes with *that*.

POSSIBLE TARGETS

NMS

Questions

Time

Space

Role shift

Sentence organization

TEACHER NOTE

No canned activity from us today.

11

Who Said That?

LEVELED

Two people are having a conversation. Use role shift.

BEGINNER	Show two different people.
INTERMEDIATE	Shift between speakers clearly.
ADVANCED	Maintain character perspective.
ADVANCED PLUS	Incorporate appropriate eye gaze and body orientation.
LEVEL 5	Create natural constructed dialogue within a short narrative.

12

One Sign — Different Meaning

LEVELED

Take a familiar sign or concept. Change one thing. What happens to the meaning?

CHANGE ONE

Facial expression

Movement

Intensity

Context

BEGINNER	Notice the difference.
INTERMEDIATE	Describe it.
ADVANCED	Produce two variations.
ADVANCED PLUS	Explain how NMS and movement affect interpretation.
LEVEL 5	Discuss subtle semantic and pragmatic differences.

13

Sentence Expansion Challenge

LEVELED

START WITH

“DOG RUN”

Now build.

BEGINNER	Add one detail.
INTERMEDIATE	Add time and location.
ADVANCED	Add description and manner.
ADVANCED PLUS	Use depiction and spatial information.
LEVEL 5	Develop the simple idea into natural connected discourse.

TEACHER NOTE

Rule: Do not just pile on vocabulary. Make the message better, not merely longer.

14

Grammar Detective

ALL LEVELS

Teacher signs three examples. Two demonstrate the target feature appropriately. One does not.

STUDENTS IDENTIFY

“Which one does not belong — and why?”

MAKE IT YOURS

Choose a grammar feature your class is currently studying.

TEACHER NOTE

A Bell Ringer version of “Find the Intruder.”

15

Describe the Difference

LEVELED

Teacher demonstrates two versions of the same basic message. Students determine what changed.

WHAT CHANGED?

NMS

Movement

Location

Perspective

Intensity

BEGINNER	Identify the change.
INTERMEDIATE	Explain the effect.
ADVANCED	Reproduce both.
ADVANCED PLUS	Create a third variation.
LEVEL 5	Explain how linguistic choices affect meaning.

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Student Grammar Challenge

STUDENT CHOICE

Students create today’s Bell Ringer. **March requirement:** it must make classmates think about how ASL works. Teacher chooses one.

POSSIBLE FORMS

Find the mistake

Choose the better version

Fix the NMS

Change the meaning

Create a question

Use space

17

English Isn’t the Boss

LEVELED

Teacher provides an English phrase that might tempt students toward word-for-word signing. Students communicate the meaning, not the English words.

BEGINNER	Identify the main concept.
INTERMEDIATE	Create a clear ASL message.
ADVANCED	Compare literal and meaning-based approaches.
ADVANCED PLUS	Create multiple ASL possibilities.
LEVEL 5	Explain why context determines the best interpretation.

TEACHER NOTE

English is not the boss of ASL. Focus on meaning, not word substitution.

18

Perspective Switch

LEVELED

Describe an event from one person’s perspective. Now switch.

BEGINNER	Clearly establish two people.
INTERMEDIATE	Show what each person sees and does.
ADVANCED	Use role shift.
ADVANCED PLUS	Maintain perspective accurately.
LEVEL 5	Shift perspective naturally within a cohesive narrative.

MAKE IT YOURS

Supply a funny or current-unit scenario.

19

Make It Natural

LEVELED

Teacher gives students an intentionally stiff or awkward signed message. Students improve it.

BEGINNER	Identify one improvement.
INTERMEDIATE	Change the structure or NMS.
ADVANCED	Produce a more natural version.
ADVANCED PLUS	Offer two possible versions.
LEVEL 5	Explain why different versions might be appropriate in different contexts.

TEACHER NOTE

Natural ASL is not about memorizing one approved sentence.

20

Grammar Is Meaning

MONTHLY REFLECTION

FINISH THE THOUGHT

“One thing I understand better about how ASL works is...”

BEGINNER	Identify one feature.
INTERMEDIATE	Give an example.
ADVANCED	Explain how it affects meaning.
ADVANCED PLUS	Compare how the feature can be used differently.
LEVEL 5	Reflect on how ASL grammar contributes to visual meaning rather than simply organizing signs.

TEACHER NOTE

Teacher Wrap-Up: Ask, “What happens to a message when we change *how* we sign it?”

March’s Big Idea

March moves students beyond simply producing signs.

The question stops being “do I know this sign?” and becomes “how does ASL create meaning?”

WHAT STUDENTS DO

ACROSS THE MONTH

Change NMS	Establish space
Shift perspective	Manipulate movement
Repair awkward messages	Compare interpretations
Communicate meaning, not English	

GRAMMAR IN ACTION

The goal is not twenty miniature grammar worksheets. Students should experience grammar through signing, watching, comparing, experimenting, and discussing what changes the meaning of a message.

GUIDING IDEA

Natural ASL is not one memorized sentence pattern. Context, meaning, visual organization, NMS, space, movement, and discourse choices all matter.

Which ones worked? Notes for next March