

## MANUAL COMMUNICATION AND SIGN LANGUAGES

### MANUAL COMMUNICATION

Manual communication is a very general term and simply refers to communication that is achieved by using the hands, in contrast to verbal communication that is achieved by using the voice. It is used to describe some sign *systems*, see below, but not sign *languages*, because the latter also use facial expression, space and direction.

#### Gesture

Gestures are movements of the body, hands and arms, with or without speech, that express an idea, emotion, attitude or intent. Common examples are clapping the hands, shrugging the shoulders and shaking the head.

#### Mime

Mime is a way of acting out something using gestures only. No speech or sound is used while going through the motions of doing something and none of the objects or tools necessary to perform the action are used. Mime is often used as a way of enhancing communication, rather than being a complete way of communicating.

#### Fingerspelling

Fingerspelling is one of the oldest forms of manual communication. It is not a language, but a system of manually representing the letters of the English alphabet and should not be confused with sign language. Fingerspelling is made up of twenty-six distinct hand shapes or "signs" to represent each of the twenty-six letters of the English alphabet.

In Australia there are two manual alphabet (fingerspelling) systems. The most common system is the two-handed Alphabet which has its origins in Britain. The less common is the one-handed alphabet, which has its origins in Ireland.

Fingerspelling is typically used in conjunction with signing and is often used for spelling proper nouns, such as place names and people's names

or technical terms that do not have a signed equivalent.

Fingerspelling may also be used as a supplement to lipreading by signing one or more appropriate letters during a spoken conversation to cue someone in to the subject being discussed.

#### Signs

Signs are quite distinct from gestures and have quite specific meanings. The majority of movements Deaf people make when communicating with each other are not fingerspelling, gesture or mime, but involve the production of signs.

### SIGN LANGUAGES

Sign languages are visual-spatial languages using distinct movements called signs in place of spoken or written words. These movements include hand shapes, eye gaze, facial expressions and arm, head and body postures. Sign languages, like any other languages, are a means of communication and are the natural languages of Deaf communities.

Contrary to popular belief there is not one universal sign language used by all Deaf people. In fact, Deaf people throughout the world use different sign languages depending on their country of origin.

There are some sign languages that are related and similar to each other in the same way that some spoken languages have similarities.

#### Auslan

Auslan (Australian Sign Language) is the native sign language of the Australian Deaf Community. It originally evolved in the 19th century from British Sign Language through the migration of Deaf people to Australia. It has developed over several decades into a separate language that Australian Deaf people use to communicate with each other.

Auslan is not a form of English. It has its own distinct syntax and grammar and is composed of precise handshapes, facial expressions and body movements that can convey both concrete and abstract information.

### **ARTIFICIAL SIGNING SYSTEMS**

These systems are not naturally occurring languages and may or may not be closely related to the signs used by Deaf people. They have all been constructed for a particular purpose, usually educational and are often aimed at producing better spoken or written language in the user. Signed English and Makaton are such systems.

#### **Signed English**

Signed English is the manual representation of the English language, word for word, using signs, both natural and contrived, following the English grammatical system. It is sometimes used in educational settings to teach Deaf people English.

While both Signed English and Auslan share many similar signs, they follow different grammatical orders.

*For Auslan interpreting services, please contact the Victorian Deaf Society Interpreting and Notetaking Service on:*

Phone: 9473 1117/8 (voice)  
TTY: 9473 1143 or  
Fax: 9473 1144

*For information about Auslan classes, contact Vicdeaf, on:*

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***services offered, please visit our website or contact us:***

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### **Other Related Fact Sheet Titles:**

- *Communicating with People who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing*
- *Deaf Interpreters – A Part of the Interpreting Team*
- *Working with an Australian Sign Language Interpreter*
- *Introduction to Auslan*

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