

Foundations of BSL: Alphabet and Fingerspelling

The alphabet in BSL is mainly signed with two hands. Signing letters in BSL is known as *fingerspelling*. Fingerspelling is used (formally) for proper nouns such as a person's name, a place or a brand. It's common to also use fingerspelling to spell words that people don't know the sign for, or a word that doesn't have an established sign yet.

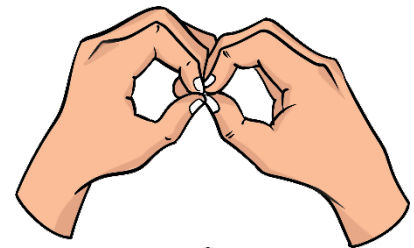
Your dominant hand should perform the main action in two-handed signs. Visualise your dominant hand being a pen and your non-dominant hand the paper.

Position your hands just in front of your chest and make sure the signs are visible to someone watching you.

When spelling out words, you should mouth the entire word, so the lip pattern of the word is accurate, not individual letters. Fluent signers tend to focus on the mouth when watching BSL with the hand movements in their peripheral vision.

You will usually have some context, therefore when understanding fingerspelling it can be useful to focus on the start and end of words because your brain can fill in the blanks.

In English, letters may be uppercase or lowercase however in BSL's manual alphabet letters do not change as there is no official written form of the language.



Increase your fingerspelling speed

Fingerspelling the names of towns and cities will help to improve your speed. Try to sign cities to a partner or in the mirror.

1. BELFAST
2. BRIGHTON
3. GLASGOW
4. GLOUCESTER
5. LEICESTER
6. LIVERPOOL
7. NORWICH
8. PLYMOUTH
9. SOUTHAMPTON
10. WREXHAM